

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER 2015 at 9.30 AM.

COUNCILLORS:

Allyson Black
Stephen Bird
Baillie William Buchanan
Steven Carleschi
Colin Chalmers
Cecil Meiklejohn (convener)
Baillie Joan Paterson
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS:

Caroline Binnie, Communications & Participation Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy & ICT Improvement
Deirdre Cilliers, Head of Social Work Adult Services
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Kathy McCarroll, Head of Social Work
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services

S19. APOLOGIES

No apologies were submitted.

S20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Chalmers declared a non-financial interest in item S23 as a relation of a service user and considered that this required him to recuse himself from consideration of the item.

S21. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 August 2015 was approved.

Provost Reid and Councillor Carleschi entered the meeting during consideration of the previous item of business.

S22. ORDER OF BUSINESS

In terms of Standing Order 25.1(iii), the committee agreed to vary the order of business from that detailed on the agenda for the meeting. The following items have been recorded in the order that they were taken at the meeting.

In accordance with his declaration, Councillors Chalmers left the meeting at this point.

S23. CLOSURE OF ROWANS SHORT BREAK SERVICE

The committee considered a report by the Head of Social Work Adult Services providing an update on the decision to close the Rowans short break service and purchase an equivalent number of places externally (ref FC69). The report provided background information which highlighted that an Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment had been undertaken. Information was also provided on communication and engagement work undertaken, alternative resources available, and the impact on service users and families. Deirdre Cilliers provided an overview of the report.

The committee asked how the required level of savings would be met if the Rowans Short Break Service was not closed. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the service would conduct a review of the available options and that services would be looked at in the round.

Members asked for an update on the engagement process undertaken. Deirdre Cilliers stated that, as highlighted in the report, there was a need for further engagement and that co-production was a possible way forward to develop the services which people need. She advised that she had met with parents of service users to discuss ideas for future services and that she was keen to get input from all parties as part of the comprehensive review.

The committee sought clarification on whether the Meadows was a comparable service. Deirdre Cilliers advised that the Meadows was local and that for some service users at the Rowans, their needs could be met at the Meadows. She highlighted that the key strength of the Meadows service was that it is local.

Further information was sought in relation to an event at the Sensory Centre on 4 November. Deirdre Cilliers stated that service providers in the area had been invited to promote the services they provide. This information would feed into the review and was part of the ongoing consultation process.

The committee discussed that most of the alternative resources highlighted in the report were not locally based. Deirdre Cilliers advised that one positive of the provision being further afield was to those who viewed respite as a 'holiday'. However, she recognised that for others more importance was placed on being near home and that this would be part of the review.

Members asked for an update on the acceptance of bookings for 2016, discussing that the public believed bookings were only being taken to December 2015. Deirdre Cilliers advised that bookings for 2016 were being taken but that she would look further into the matter and provide information after the meeting.

Decision

The committee agreed:-

- (1) to note the information provided in this update report regarding engagement with service users and carers;**
- (2) to note that the proposed closure of Rowans will not take place within the current financial year;**
- (3) to note that a full review will now be undertaken within the current financial year, and**
- (4) to request that a report on the process of and lessons learned from the Rowans budget decision is submitted to a future meeting.**

Councillor Chalmers rejoined the meeting following the conclusion of the previous item of business.

S24. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate & Housing Services Providing information following the evaluation of public performance reporting by Councils carried out by Audit Scotland. The report covered the background to the evaluation, information about Falkirk Council's assessment and set out improvement actions that would be taken by the Council. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report and Caroline Binnie then provided the committee with a short presentation.

The committee asked when the improvement plan would be available and stated that it was good to compare practice against other local authorities. Caroline Binnie stated that Audit Scotland rated each Council on each area, if it is identified that Falkirk needed to make improvements in a particular area the service would look at exemplar Councils to then draft an action plan.

Members asked about take up of information by age group and the use of Falkirk News. Caroline Binnie stated that the approach varies and that there had been positive feedback on the different methods used. It can be difficult to engage younger people in traditional forms of engagement. The Falkirk News was recognised as being a good method of providing information to the public. The service was using Twitter more actively to engage with young people and this had been found to be successful. There had recently concluded a scrutiny panel on consultation and engagement which had spent time focussing on the issue of engaging younger people.

The committee asked how the Council shares improvements through You Said, We Did. Caroline Binnie advised that the Citizens Panel was in the format of You Said, We Did and that the service could look at extending this. She also highlighted the use of plasma screens in various Council offices which displayed information to the public.

Members discussed the use of the Council's website. Caroline Binnie advised that the information presented on the home screen was varied to keep it relevant and up to

date. She highlighted that most external visitors to the website do not access it through the homepage.

The committee asked about the cost associated with utilising new methods such as Twitter. Caroline Binnie advised that there was a staff cost involved as people were needed to monitor and feed information into the account. This was met through existing resources. Teams were becoming more aligned to digital media.

In response to a question on what information was provided to the public on staff performance, Caroline Binnie advised that reports with indicators on sickness absence, turnover, training and satisfaction were provided.

The committee discussed what areas it was felt the public was most interested in. Caroline Binnie stated that a question was asked in the bi-annual customer survey about what the public is most interest in and how they want that information. She advised that Falkirk News rated highly and that the rating for the website was increasing.

Members asked what information on the website was the most popular. Caroline Binnie advised that school holiday information was very popular as was information on Home Spot. Further, there were areas which had spikes in demand seasonally such as information on road gritting during winter.

Decision

The committee noted the report.

S25. SOCIAL WORK CHILDREN & FAMILIES BUDGET POSITION

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services providing information on the budget overspend in social work children and families service during the financial year 2014/15. The report also provided contextual information and information on actions to monitor and manage expenditure. Kathy McCarroll provided an overview of the report.

The committee discussed the pressures associated with placements for looked after children away from home noting that Falkirk had a higher percentage away from home than at home. Kathy McCarroll stated that the service was investigating the trend in this area, particular in relation to the higher number of children looked after away from home. There was some evidence to show that the increase in the number of younger children becoming accommodated and the consequential increase in the number of permanence orders was linked to increases in drug and alcohol abuse. In relation to Children's Hearings decisions she advised that the service did not track the recommendation of the social worker compared to the final decision by Children's Hearings. However, this information would be available in the near future. Robert Naylor stated that the Reporter was being invited to visit the services available in the area to ensure that decisions were being taken in that light. Kathy McCarroll advised that since January there had been two cases considered by the Sherriff Court which had resulted in decisions for secure accommodation which the Council was liable to implement and fund.

Members asked about the progress of the former Focus School in Laurieston. Robert Naylor stated that it was hoped that more children who were currently looked after away from home would be able to return home as their education needs would be catered for in the area. There was also work ongoing to upskill staff at the Mariner Support Service to cater for those children and young people currently in residential care.

The committee sought information on how significant the increase of drug and alcohol abuse had been compared to previous years. Kathy McCarroll stated that the number of children on the Child Protection Register had increased over the last two years mainly as a result of the increase in substance abuse in this area.

Members discussed the rates paid to foster carers compared to those available in the private sector. Kathy McCarroll advised that fees were paid to foster carers and that in addition to this there was an age related payment per child. Some external agencies pay one flat rate and others do not provide information on the breakdown of their payments. The service continually tried to recruit new foster carers and she advised that the feedback received was that the fees and allowances paid were satisfactory. There was evidence that the Council was losing foster carers to external agencies. In response to a question on having had foster carers switch from external agencies to the Council, Kathy McCarroll stated that she was not aware of a significant movement in this direction and that the level of pay was likely a barrier to those already associated with external agencies.

The committee asked about the approach taken to sibling groups in care and if they were ever split up. Kathy McCarroll stated that the service tried to keep siblings together when first accommodated but that beyond this it was determined by individual need. Recent legislation limited foster carers to three children per household. Where adoption for siblings was considered a together or apart assessment was carried out. She advised that there had been an increase in the number of sibling groups who needed to be accommodated.

Members highlighted that priority needed to be given to collaborative early intervention work on drug and alcohol abuse. Fiona Campbell stated that the Drug and Alcohol Partnership had commissioned work to identify what the key issues are. The clinical advice was that rehabilitation facilities were not good for long term outcomes. The outcome of this work would be available to the Community Planning Partnership in December.

The committee asked for further information on the process of engaging external foster care agencies. Kathy McCarroll stated that there was a public social partnership approach to external agencies adopted in 2012. She advised that the Scottish Government had a national contract on foster care and residential school care which the service was looking at in considering whether to renew the local contract or not.

The committee requested a report once work had been progressed to address the overspend and that a further budget position update was provided.

Decision

The committee agreed to request an update report on the implementation of actions identified in the report, to provide updated information on the budget situation and categorisation of reasons for children becoming accommodated to a future meeting.

Provost Reid left the meeting during consideration of the previous item of business.

S26. SOCIAL WORK ADULT SERVICES OVERSPEND 2014/2015

The committee considered a report by the Head of Social Work Adult Services providing information on the budget overspend in social work adult services during the financial year 2014/15. The report also provided contextual information and information on actions to monitor and manage expenditure. Deirdre Cilliers provided an overview of the report.

Members sought further information on eligibility criteria. Deirdre Cilliers stated that it was a complex area. She advised that the first priority was to ensure that everyone was being fully assessed for services and given the right services for their needs. She also stated that a review of assessment on lower level needs needed to be carried out to ensure that assistance was provided to these people as quickly as possible. Through focus on reablement and better practice the service would be able to improve the budget position.

The committee highlighted that the service needed to make improved use of its resources, a question was asked if home carers could help with medication. Deirdre Cilliers advised that medication was a significant issue and that home carers do not administer medication in Falkirk but do in some other areas. However, she advised that the home carers in Falkirk do prompt people to take their medication. She stated that the training of staff was a priority for the service. Through the use of Integrated Care Funds a pharmacist had been employed for six months to scope the work that was required and to do simple assessments.

Members commented on the increasing demand for home adaptations and that in some cases a person's condition could deteriorate while waiting for the work to be carried out. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the service would look at how to do things differently and get small adaptations in place quickly. She advised that Integrated Care Funding was also being used to get a trainer for home carers so that they worked in a more reabling way. This was particularly important so that older people at home do not lose confidence in their ability to carry out tasks themselves. In response to a question on the availability of suitable housing, Deirdre Cilliers stated that there was good work carried out in collaboration with Housing. An occupational therapist was employed in Housing. She stated that there was sheltered housing available locally and that the service could improve in demonstrating to people the benefits of moving there.

The committee asked what the most significant area of overspend was. Deirdre Cilliers stated that there was a particular pressure on care packages for people with learning disabilities. However, frail elderly as a demographic were the most significant area of demand. The members then discussed the use of group homes in place of individual 24 hour placements.

The committee requested a further report on mitigating factors and service redesign.

Decision

The committee agreed to request an update report on the implementation of actions identified in the report including service redesign and mitigating factors.

S27. PERFORMANCE PANEL SCHEDULE

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing, as an appendix, a reporting schedule for the performance panel for 2016. Colin Moodie provided an overview of the report.

Decision

The committee agreed to the schedule of meetings for the Performance Panel as appended to the report.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the PERFORMANCE PANEL held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 1 OCTOBER 2015 at 9.30 AM.

CORE MEMBERS: Stephen Bird
Cecil Meiklejohn (Convener)
Rosie Murray
Baillie Joan Paterson
Depute Provost John Patrick

MEMBERS
ATTENDING: Jim Blackwood
Brian McCabe
Alan Nimmo
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS: Alex Black, Quality Improvement Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy and ICT Improvement
Deirdre Cilliers, Head of Social Work Adult Services
Alex Finlay, Business Development Manager
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Philip Morgan-Klein, Service Manager
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing Services

PP6. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 21 May 2015 was approved.

PP7. SERVICE PERFORMANCE PLANS 2015 - 18

(i) Report by the Chief Executive

The panel considered a report by the Chief Executive setting out the Council's planning framework, the structure of the Service Performance Plans and highlighting the key challenges each service needed to address. Following the publication of the Best Value Audit the report also highlighted some areas where performance management arrangements would be developed. Appended to the report were the service performance plans for each service which covered the period September 2015 to March 2018. Mary Pitcaithly provided an overview of the report.

Members welcomed the comprehensive information provided, but raised some concern at the limited time available to fully consider and reflect on performance plans.

Decision

The panel noted the report.

(ii) Corporate and Housing Services – Service Performance Plan 2015 – 2018.

The panel considered the Service Performance Plan for Corporate and Housing Services for 2015 - 2018. Stuart Ritchie provided an overview of the performance plan.

The panel asked how many new builds had been completed since May 2012 and how many properties had been brought back into Council ownership through buy backs. Stuart Ritchie advised that he would provide the new build information after the meeting and that around 70 properties a year were brought into Council ownership through buy backs.

Members asked if in the process of integration to create the new Corporate and Housing Services there had been any duplication of service identified. Stuart Ritchie stated that the terms used to describe teams were a legacy from the previous service structure but that the work of each team was not duplicated by another.

The panel discussed the development of mobile flexible working and the Council's approach provision of IT services. Stuart Ritchie stated that an IT Governance board comprising officers developed the service's capital programme bids. In the previous year £1.8 million had been allocated from the capital programme fund to mobile and flexible working solutions to make necessary improvements to infrastructure. Mary Pitcaithly advised that there were other external influences on IT provision and highlighted the case of a replacement social work services IT system. In that case a system was required which would be compatible with NHS Forth Valley, Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council, particularly following the implementation of the Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014. Members then asked if there were plans for the Falkirk Community Trust to develop an online booking system. Fiona Campbell stated that regular meetings were held with the Trust and that IT support was provided to the Trust from the Council. Further, capital programme funding had been allocated to the Trust previously.

Members sought an update on the pathways of the Council's modern apprentices and if they were entering employment after being an apprentice. Stuart Ritchie advised that the detailed information was held by the Employment Training Unit and that information could be provided after the meeting. Mary Pitcaithly stated that in the past nearly all modern apprentices who wanted to stay with the Council were able to be retained and that the Council still worked to assist all modern apprentices into further employment going forward. Rhona Geisler stated that at any one time there were approximately 500 trainees with the Council. She advised that the Council's STAR project would help to create more opportunities for young people as the Council's administration and support staff were being integrated and no new permanent positions would be recruited to.

The panel asked if the Covalent system was used corporately for performance management. Stuart Ritchie stated that Covalent was used on a corporate basis but that it was only one of the Council's performance management tools. He stated that it was also important that the views of Councillors and customers were utilised as that was the quickest method of getting feedback to take learning from.

Members discussed that in uncertain times for the public sector it would be challenging to inspire staff and asked how this would be done. Stuart Ritchie stated that it was important to communicate praise better and to recognise the hard work of staff. It was also important in talking up success to share that with all parts of the service so that different areas could take learning from each other. Further, there would be engagement with staff to ask for their views on improvement. Mary Pitcaithly stated that staff understood the pressures facing the Council but were committed and enthusiastic. Further, she advised that workload pressures would continue to be monitored.

The panel sought further information on best practice sharing across the service. Stuart Ritchie advised that staff were keen to know what their colleagues were doing and wanted to hear about others good practice. People from different staff groups were brought together to discuss practice, this was helpful in both areas of good work and less good work as issues were often not unique and staff could learn from how others had dealt with certain situations. Mary Pitcaithly stated that the strategic leadership team had a responsibility to ensure that good practice was shared. She highlighted the Celebrating Success Awards were appreciated by staff.

Members asked about the financial pressures facing the service and about the role of the third sector in service provision. Stuart Ritchie stated that a lot of funding was provided to the third sector, approximately £5 million. He advised that the future direction of partnership working and levels of funding would be determined by Councillors through the budget process. The service had made third sector organisations aware that reviewing funding to external organisations was part of the budget process and therefore any changes to funding levels would be notified with as much time as possible.

The panel asked about the anticipated increase to the number of properties for rent within the Council area over the period of the plan. Stuart Ritchie advised that around 70 properties a year would be added to the rental stock through buy back. He highlighted that there were constraints in the area of available land and so new builds were most often done in small pockets of 10 to 12 properties. He advised that he would provide more detailed information after the meeting.

Members asked for further information on a timescale regarding Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) for mobile and flexible working. Fiona Campbell stated that mobile and flexible working would allow employees to engage with customers in locations and at times which suited them and then staff could communicate back to central offices. She advised that the service was looking at the specification of the tender for telephones, which would be 'follow me', mobile phones and that voice over the internet was to not be desk bound. She stated that the tender would be compiled in this calendar year.

The panel inquired if work was being carried out to encourage development of community councils where there was not one currently active. Mary Pitcaithly stated that the Council try to encourage community council participation but that there had been a lack of success in some areas. Prior to the next set of community council elections the issue would be looked at to identify if there were ways to promote the role of community councils and encourage participation.

Following a question on local CCTV provision, Stuart Ritchie advised that Enigma monitored the CCTV service and were based at Falkirk Police Station.

The panel discussed sickness absence levels and target setting as the sickness absence for craft employees in the service was over 2% higher than the target. Stuart Ritchie stated that the absence level had been too high and that the target had been ambitious. The service was looking closely at how to improve performance on absence, in particular there was a focus on staff who work outwith an office environment. Members commented that targets need to be achievable and set at particular levels for clear reasons. Stuart Ritchie advised that the figures from the previous two years had showed that the target should be achievable. Mary Pitcaithly advised that targets were being reviewed with Councillors and that improvement groups were focussing on this as well.

Members asked about the process of implementing and reviewing the Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment process across the Council. Stuart Ritchie stated that the work undertaken would be touched on in the budget briefings and would be reported to Councillors in due course.

The panel asked if shadowing was encouraged in the service as a part of staff development. Stuart Ritchie stated that shadowing was not actively promoted but that as part of a package of development it could be a useful tool, used in proportion.

Members asked about the service's priorities for mobile and flexible working. Stuart Ritchie stated that pilots would be run. Previously the capacity to utilise technology was limited by servers and licenses being restricted but capacity would be increased by the end of October. Chief Officers and Councillors were part of the pilot of mobile working and six staff from Building Maintenance had been provided with mobile handheld devices. Following the improvements to the servers the pilot would be rolled out further.

Decision

The panel noted the Service plan.

(iii) Development Services – Service Performance Plan 2015 - 2018

The panel considered the Service Performance Plan for Development Services for 2015 - 2018. Rhona Geisler provided an overview of the performance plan.

Members asked for information on employment opportunities to disabled people. Rhona Geisler advised that there were changes to the EU directive in the definition of supported businesses to, “businesses whose main aim is to socially and

professionally integrate disabled or disadvantaged people”. The threshold of workers who must meet that description is being reduced from 50 % to at least 30 % and the scope is broadened beyond disabled people.

The panel commented on the quality of the waste collection service and asked if the level of complaints were as a result of the scale of the service. Rhona Geisler advised that this was likely to be the case and that the service would focus on how complaints of missed bins were measured.

Members requested that all services include the names of officers alongside their titles in all future Management Structure tables.

The panel asked for information on the impact of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. Rhona Geisler stated that the Act introduced the expectation that community benefit clauses would be used when appropriate. Members then asked about the requirement that public bodies comply with new duties including the publication of policies on community benefits. Rhona Geisler advised that this was already practice in Falkirk before having been required by the Act.

Members asked when the planning application for the new Council headquarters would be submitted. Rhona Geisler advised that the application would be submitted within the coming week.

The panel asked about the Development Management Customer Charter. Rhona Geisler stated that the charter would be published by the end of the year and that information had been gathered by an established format in line with a national approach. She stated that she would provide information on the process after the meeting.

Members discussed the value of performance measures which were to ‘monitor and review’ stating that these should be removed from the performance plan.

The panel discussed the timescales around works on Denny Town Centre. Rhona Geisler provided information on the work of phase one, which would be completed by March 2017.

Members asked about the measurement of responses to freedom of information requests. Mary Pitcaithly advised that there was a corporate approach across all services and that the Council worked to ensure compliance with statutory timescales.

The panel discussed the percentage of upheld complaints, asking if 50% was too high. Rhona Geisler stated that a lot of the complaints were in relation to waste management and the performance of a contractor in collecting small waste caddies. The service had altered the conditions of the contract to ensure improvement.

Members asked about asset management. Rhona Geisler stated that work was being done with the Community Planning Partnership on asset management projects and development of the corporate asset management plan.

The panel asked for further information on the Parks Development Plan. Rhona Geisler stated that each primary park would have a masterplan.

Members sought information on the work undertaken with job seekers with additional support needs. Rhona Geisler advised that the service worked with young people to develop pathways into employment. This was a developing strand of work and lots of useful learning had been taken from the project with Haven PTS.

The panel asked about the timescale for upgrading Falkirk crematorium. Rhona Geisler advised that the project was a phased programme. In 2016/17 the car park, building and cremators upgrades would be completed. Mary Pitcaithly stated that information on the crematorium upgrades had been included in the report to the Executive on Capital Programme Updates considered on 29 September 2015.

Members asked about work on flood prevention across the district. Rhona Geisler stated that mapping work was ongoing and that Grangemouth was the area of highest priority in Scotland.

Decision

The panel noted the Service plan.

(iv) Children's Services – Service Performance Plan 2015 - 2018

The panel considered the Service Performance Plan for Children's Services for 2015 - 2018. Robert Naylor provided an overview of the performance plan.

Members asked about monitoring and tracking arrangements in schools. Robert Naylor advised that testing was carried out in primaries one, three, five and seven and in second year of high school. This allowed the service to track the progress of a pupil and now that there was three years of data comparisons could start to be made. He stated that alongside test data the judgement of class teachers had an important role in tracking. Education Scotland had asked the Council for information on the data it held and found that 27 other councils had a similar system. This was an area of continued focus for the service, particularly on monitoring health and wellbeing indicators.

The panel asked when the looked after children and inclusion review reports would be available. Robert Naylor stated that the looked after children scrutiny panel was due to report in March 2016 and the inclusion review report would be submitted by June 2016.

Members asked about the percentage of children and young people responding that they felt safe and well looked after in school. Robert Naylor stated that he intended to change the measure. He wanted to put a new measure in place which would allow like for like comparisons to be made to track progress.

The panel asked for further information on service spending on looked after children. Robert Naylor stated that the information would be provided to the Scrutiny Committee on 15 October 2015.

Members asked if the Children's Service IT system would be designed to interface with that of Social Work Adult Services for the long term. Mary Pitcaithly stated that this was something of a dilemma as the Social Work Adults Service system also needed to be able to link with that of NHS Forth Valley. She advised that NHS Forth Valley were looking at replacing their system in the next few years. Robert Naylor advised that Police Scotland were also looking at developing a new system.

The panel asked about the high level of social work staff absence. Deirdre Cilliers stated that while absence was an issue the trend was improving. The service would utilise additional resources to address the issue. Members discussed that the target level of sickness absence should be 6% in recognition of the challenge in this area.

Decision

The panel noted the Service plan.

(v) Social Work Adult Services – Service Performance Plan 2015 - 2018

The panel considered the Service Performance Plan for Social Work Adult Services for 2015 - 2018. Deirdre Cilliers provided an overview of the performance plan.

Members asked about a review of the Council's approach to charging and if Falkirk's rates were lower than others. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the service was looking at a root and branch review back to the very basic principles. She also stated that the charges in Falkirk were not high compared with national averages. This was important to ensure that the approach fit better with self directed support. She advised that training of self directed support had been rolled out and people were asked about it during their assessments. There was also a dedicated team for more complex cases. The number of service users making use of self directed support was up from 1% in the previous year to 5% in the current year. Members asked about direct payments and if those levels had increased. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the uptake was not very high and had now been subsumed into self directed support. Figures on the options of uptake would be provided after the meeting.

The panel asked about the implementation of a new IT system in social work to enable single shared assessments. Philip Morgan-Klein advised that this area was a priority for the service and that the joint management group had recognised the need to progress the implementation of a replacement system.

Members asked how the service intended to improve its reputation with the public. Deirdre Cilliers stated that there would be a review of services and that practice would be changed to get more service provided more quickly. More technology would be utilised and the service would look to build confidence in communities.

The panel discussed the information on data zones in the most deprived nationally and how this compared with other authorities. Fiona Campbell stated that data zones were very small areas of only approximately two hundred people. The Falkirk area was comprised of hundreds of data zones in total. She advised that Glasgow had significantly the most data zones in the most deprived group nationally and that Ayrshire had more than Falkirk. She highlighted the Council's Poverty Strategy aimed to address issues of deprivation locally.

Members asked about the provision of occupational therapy equipment and occupational therapy assessments. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the issue with provision of equipment was to do with a staffing issue which had had a big impact as the team was quite small. The management of this issue was being looked at and contingency plans at the front line had been put in place. In relation to assessments Deirdre Cilliers stated that a review of the eligibility criteria would help to address the issue. She also advised that the most up to date position was that the figures were 3% down on the previous year.

Decision

The panel noted the Service plan.

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the PERFORMANCE PANEL held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2015 at 9.30 AM.

CORE MEMBERS: Stephen Bird
Cecil Meiklejohn (convener)
Rosie Murray
Baillie Joan Paterson
Depute Provost John Patrick

MEMBERS David Alexander
ATTENDING: Jim Blackwood
Colin Chalmers
Brian McCabe

OFFICERS: Steve Bentley, Strategy & Private Sector Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy & IT Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Kenny Gillespie, Property & Asset Manager
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate & Housing Services
Steve Sankey, Revenues Project Manager

PP8. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 1 October 2015 was approved.

PP9. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT – WAY FORWARD

The performance panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate & Housing Services outlining proposals to take forward the recommendations made in the Best Value Audit report on Falkirk Council's performance management. The report set out proposals for a workshop with members on performance reporting arrangements. Stuart Ritchie provided an overview of the report.

The panel discussed the proposals for a members' workshop and put forward the view that the event be held in January 2016 in order to maximise attendance.

Members asked how the service would ensure that actions are followed up and delivered on time. In relation to actions raised at the performance panel Stuart Ritchie advised that the Service either responds to the member raising the request directly or the information is included in the next report to the panel. There was then discussion on the use of an action tracker, with reference made to one used at the audit committee. Members were

mindful that such a tool would be useful and also considered a more comprehensive report section entitled 'Updates from last panel'.

The panel discussed performance reporting in relation to Falkirk Community Trust (the Trust) and a question was asked on whether such reports would be considered by the panel. Rose Mary Glackin advised that the Trust reported through the Following the Public Pound framework to scrutiny committee (external). Fiona Campbell stated that at the most recent meeting of scrutiny committee (external) changes to the report submitted by the Trust had been requested in order that the most pertinent information is provided. Previously the committee had received the same performance reports as the Trust submitted to its board.

Decision

The performance panel noted:-

- (i) the specific improvement actions in the Best Value Improvement Plan relating to Performance Management;**
- (ii) that a workshop for Councillors is being organised and is focussed on the areas outlined in section 4 of the report, and**
- (iii) the new style performance report format being prepared by Services.**

PP10. CORPORATE AND HOUSING PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The performance panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate & Housing Services setting out a summary of performance for the period April to September 2015. The report provided information on key priorities, key areas for improvement, an update from the last meeting, important indicators and engagement with customers. Appended to the report was the Corporate & Housing Services – Performance Panel Statement – April to September 2015. Stuart Ritchie provided an overview of the report highlighting that it was in a remodelled format following discussions between officers and the convener. The format of the report would be subject to further review through the workshop for members on performance reporting.

An overview was also given of the four Improvement Groups that had been set up to look at Future Frontline Service Delivery to Customers, Services to Tenants, Rent Collection and Rent Arrears and the Building Maintenance Division.

The panel discussed the review of depot provision within Building Maintenance and asked for further information. Stuart Ritchie stated that the review was still at an early stage and that this was the first time a single depot solution had been considered. A significant amount of planning would be required to make it work but it would be aided by the move toward mobile and flexible working. He advised that some vehicles could be kept at home by staff overnight and assured members that all these vehicles would be fitted with appropriate tracking devices. Mobile and flexible working would also mean that many staff would not need to attend the depot before commencing work as they could have their lines delivered to their mobile devices rather than needing to physically collect them. Following a question seeking further information on the potential benefits

of this approach, Kenny Gillespie stated that the proposals would result in more effective deployment of staff and better management of appointments.

In response to a question on the cost of the lease of the Winchester depot, Stuart Ritchie advised that it was approximately £40,000 a year.

The panel welcomed the assessment of the Building Maintenance Division undertaken by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) and the workstreams established to take the outcomes from it forward and remarked positively on the benefit of reviewing services proactively from a position of strength rather than when in crisis.

The panel discussed the Service improvement groups in general and asked about member input. Stuart Ritchie stated that the Service would report back on improvements and achievements to the panel and noted that, if successful, members would see the impact of these groups in practice. In relation to the two most recently formed improvement groups he advised that terms of reference would be developed and then submitted to the panel so that members could comment on the direction taken.

Members asked for the anticipated percentage increase to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for the next year as a result of new builds and buy backs. Stuart Ritchie stated that he would obtain the indicative information after the meeting and provide it to members.

The panel discussed the process of moving tenancy and raised concern that people could get into arrears at an early stage as their liability for rent commenced immediately which could involve them in double rent payments if their existing tenancy was still in place. Steve Bentley advised that Tenancy Sustainment Officers worked closely with tenants at risk of entering arrears.

There was then discussion on the consistency of approach, members highlighted that people accepting a tenancy for a property which was ready to be moved into immediately compared to those who accepted a property where work was first to be carried out were at a potential disadvantage. Steve Bentley stated that if a property met the void standard then it was ready for a tenancy to commence immediately and that the Service's satisfaction rates showed the process worked well. He stated that the Service was proactive in the allocation process and aimed to get vacant properties occupied again as quickly as possible, however he was happy to look at specific cases brought to this attention where the property was considered not to meet the required standard.

Members asked how the Service would evidence that it was meeting the objectives of Future Frontline Service Delivery to Customers. Fiona Campbell stated that services to customers had been looked at and that work was being undertaken to meet the needs of those customers not visiting one stop shops including hard to reach groups. Significant amounts of information had been gathered on why people were and were not using one stop shops as well as on how they were using services once there. This had provided the Service with a baseline from which it could track progress and measure if a better service was being provided after making changes.

The panel asked what timescales were in place for the delivery of the APSE recommendations. Stuart Ritchie stated that he would provide a copy of the timescales to all members after the meeting.

A question was asked about the APSE recommendation to review of operating costs within Fleet Management to see if the cost per vehicle per annum could be reduced to closer to the average experienced by other authorities; in particular, what was the average cost? Kenny Gillespie stated that he would provide all members with this information.

The panel asked for information on the target time for completing works on void properties. Steve Bentley advised that the target was 35 days for the whole process and that he would get information on the percentage meeting the target after the meeting.

Members asked what issues could cause delays which make the turnaround take longer than the target timescale. Steve Bentley advised that one cause of delays was that some properties were more challenging to let than others with some going to second and third advertisement. He stated that many properties were turned around well within the 35 day target. Kenny Gillespie stated that some issues were associated with Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) work where tenants had refused upgrade works when in residence. The Service looked at each void property as it became accessible and carried out works to improve the standards where necessary.

Members discussed voluntary severance within the Building Maintenance Division and asked if some of those who had accepted offers were painters. Kenny Gillespie confirmed that there had been some uptake of voluntary severance from painters in the asset management team. In response to a question on the use of externally tendered painters for one third of the cyclical painterwork to the end of March 2016, Kenny Gillespie stated that a benefit from that approach was establishing an appropriate benchmark for the work as recommended by APSE. The Service would then look at how the work could be taken on within current resources. In relation to cyclical maintenance he advised that modern materials lasting longer than those used previously and other natural efficiencies would benefit the Service.

The panel asked about the format of performance reporting information provided to the public, such as that on the Council's website. Stuart Ritchie stated that the report currently under consideration by members would be published on the website. He advised that the workshop for members would include discussion of what the best style of public performance reporting was. The convener highlighted that public performance reporting had recently been considered at the Scrutiny committee including a presentation on the use of social media and plasma screens at one stop shops.

In response to a question on the availability of service self assessments to members, Stuart Ritchie stated that a report would be submitted to the performance panel by the end of March 2016 on the programme of self assessments and service reviews to be undertaken and thereafter the Panel would receive reports on implementation and progress..

Members asked which area was being considered as the pilot of a hub and spoke model of advice and support services. Fiona Campbell stated that a pilot was being proposed to ensure that the anticipated improvements were achieved before rolling out Council wide. The proposed location of the pilot would be reported to the panel. She advised that evidence gathered through the scrutiny panel on Citizens Advice Bureau services had identified that it was most effective to go to where people already were rather than expect them to attend offices to get services. This was, however, dependent on the services available in a particular area and how they were utilised by the local community.

Stuart Ritchie advised that 85 local shops had entered an agreement to use PayPoint facilities so that people could more conveniently pay their rent and Council tax.

Following a further question on which other authorities had been looked at, Fiona Campbell advised that the approach of a range of authorities had been considered. This had included examination of the services provided by North Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council, Dundee Council, West Lothian Council and Perth & Kinross Council, all of which had different ways of delivering services. She highlighted that West Lothian Council no longer took payments at their offices and hosted multi-agency facilities through their offices while Stirling and Dundee Councils operated centralised offices. The Service had considered many options to find the best approach for services and customers in Falkirk.

The panel sought information on how any impact on vulnerable groups would be mitigated and asked if equality and poverty impact assessments were being carried out. Fiona Campbell stated that assessments were being undertaken to understand the nature of the impact but that if the right model of service was implemented then access to services and payments would increase through the use of mobile and online methods. She emphasised the particular importance of ensuring that services were available to vulnerable groups and, if any diminution in service was identified for a particular group, the Service would identify what could be done to mitigate against this. She highlighted that 51% of visits to the Council's website were made using a smart phone.

Members discussed the membership of the housing management review group. Steve Bentley stated that tenant feedback was reflected and incorporated through the tenant representative who was supported by the community engagement team to participate fully. He stated that consultation was central to the review. Members then asked if consideration had been given to having two tenants representatives on the group, with one from a rural area and one from an urban area. Steve Bentley stated that the current arrangements were considered to allow for effective contribution from tenants.

Members suggested that a representative from Social Work Adult Services would be a valuable contributor to the group due to the pressures which would be faced from changing older people demographics.

A question was asked to establish how long the work scheduling team pilot would run before being evaluated. Kenny Gillespie stated that the evaluation had begun. A baseline position had been established to measure improvements against. He highlighted that all general maintenance jobs in the pilot area were by appointment with a date and an a.m. or p.m. timeslot provided. Further, staff were now ringing ahead to customers before attending appointments. In response to a subsequent question, Kenny Gillespie advised that the pilot had been carried out with operational staff and had been considered successful by those involved.

The panel asked for an update on the work being carried out in relation to refugees. Stuart Ritchie stated that detailed preparatory work was currently being carried out both within the Council and with community planning partners to ensure that a co-ordinated approach was in place. It was intended to report on this work to Council in December. Members sought clarification on when the Council would be ready to accept refugees to the area. Stuart Ritchie advised that the report to Council in December would seek approval to liaise with the Home Office in early 2016.

Members discussed digital self service and asked what measures were being put in place to ensure that people who wanted to engage with services in person could still do so. Fiona Campbell stated that a review was being undertaken to ensure that appropriate access to services was in place for all including the most vulnerable. She advised that a significant section of the community wanted flexible digital services which could be accessed at their convenience. She confirmed that there required to be a variety of means by which services could be accessed. She stated that currently there was limited flexibility in accessing services and that people had to use one stop shops or phone services and that doing so was at a higher cost to the Council and less convenient for most people.

The panel welcomed the aim of the rent collection & rent arrears improvement group to ensure that the Council's performance is within the top half of Scottish authorities by the end of 2017/18 and asked how this would be achieved. Stuart Ritchie stated that the group would develop an action plan and that this would be submitted to a future meeting of the panel. He advised that the Rent Improvement Plan had been submitted to the Housing Regulator.

Further information on the successes of the mobile and flexible working project in the Building Maintenance Division was sought by the panel. Kenny Gillespie advised that early indications from staff were positive. The project had been brought in to reduce paperwork and, among other things, the impact of lost job lines. Tenants now signed off the job on the mobile device which gave confidence that the work had been completed to a satisfactory standard. Staff time was more effectively utilised and trade unions had seen the introduction of mobile and flexible working solutions as positive.

Members asked how the Service could make low demand housing more attractive. Steve Bentley stated that properties were advertised in Home Spot on a weekly basis and that the new void standard had helped improve these properties. The Service held proactive discussions with potential tenants to encourage uptake of these properties and environmental works had been carried out to improve areas with lower demand.

The panel sought information on why the percentage of housing stock meeting the SHQS had reduced. Kenny Gillespie stated that the Scottish Government had changed how compliance was reported. Previously, in cases where a customer refused works, the property was included in the figures as a pass but that had now been changed to only those properties which fully complied with the standard.

Members asked for information on why the percentage of rent lost through voids was not meeting the target. Steve Bentley advised that there had been an increase in the number of days lost due to an increase in the number of empty properties, with a 10% uplift over the previous year. The panel then asked why there had been such an increase in the number of voids. Steve Bentley stated that this was due to the number of new build and buy back properties which increased the stock and created more voids. While the figure was slightly above average, he advised that this was not felt to be a worrying trend.

In response to a question on the percentage of freedom of information requests being dealt with in 20 working days, Fiona Campbell noted that the Scrutiny Committee had considered a report on the Council's approach to FOI. Rose Mary Glackin stated that the Scottish Information Commissioner produced an annual report giving an overview of performance across Scotland and that no concerns had been raised in relation to Falkirk Council. She advised that where the deadline of 20 working days was not complied with this was most often by only one or two days.

The panel sought further information on progress toward identifying a suitable electronic document and records management system (EDRMS) as this target was shown as being significantly behind target. Stuart Ritchie stated that in the service plan there had been the intention to look at a suitable corporate approach to EDRMS but there was a need to prioritise resources and staff time had required to be focussed on the mobile and flexible working project, as that was business critical. At the current time EDRMS was not business critical but he assured the panel that work would continue in this area.

Members asked how Falkirk compared against other authorities in relation to the performance indicator measuring gross rent arrears as at 31 March each year as a percentage of rent due for the reporting year. Steve Sankey stated that the benchmark was national and that, measured against other authorities, Falkirk performed well. He highlighted that there had been a 1.5% improvement in the figures from the previous year.

The panel asked what reasons were given by owner occupiers who had refused SHQS improvement works. Kenny Gillespie stated that a significant number of people refusing were elderly and that familiarity with, for example, their current heating system was one reason for refusal along with nervousness of using gas and the disruption caused by works. The Service was looking at how to best engage with people who had refused works to explain the benefits to them.

Members asked for further information on absence levels in the Service. Kenny Gillespie stated the Service was working hard to support craft areas to improve absence levels. Following a comment that the levels were quite a way off the benchmark Stuart Ritchie advised that comparing authorities against one another was not comparing like for like as all councils have different absence management policies which have a significant impact on absence levels. He stated that absence was tracked and monitored effectively. The issue was being looked at carefully and the Service was looking at best practice from other authorities.

The panel asked about the development of a housing strategy for older people to meet the needs of an increasingly ageing population and raised that the Service could work more effectively with social work on home adaptations. Kenny Gillespie stated that this area was currently under review. He highlighted that eight third sector organisations had been involved in development of the strategy and that wide consultation had been carried out.

Members sought more information on progress toward meeting the SHQS and asked about the percentage of exemptions and abeyances compared to the total housing stock. Kenny Gillespie advised that in the previous year exemptions were approximately 17% of the stock. He stated that there needed to be a sustained focus of capital spending in this area. In response to a comment that as properties become void the number should reduce, Kenny Gillespie stated that the Service was targeting 89% compliance and that by the end of the financial year performance should be close to that. The Service was being more proactive in promoting the benefits of SHQS work. Following a request from members, Stuart Ritchie confirmed that the new void standard would be circulated to all members.

Decision

The performance panel noted the report.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE – OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date: 3 DECEMBER 2015
Author: DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The committee agreed at its meeting on 14 May 2015 (ref S11) to establish a scrutiny panel to examine outcomes for looked after children.
- 1.2 This report updates committee on the work of the panel to date and appends the revised scoping document and notes of meetings to date.

2. SCOPE AND FORMAT FOR THE PANEL

- 2.1 The Panel, chaired by Councillor Meiklejohn, with other members being Councillors Chalmers, Hughes, McLuckie and Provost Reid agreed that the scope of the scrutiny panel would be: Why, if at all, are outcomes for looked after children different from their non-looked after peers and are there differences between different groups of looked after children, e.g those with special educational needs, those looked after away from home, looked after at home, in residential care and foster care?
- 2.2 In order to examine this question, the panel has established a programme of meetings as set out in the revised scoping document appended to this report at appendix one.
- 2.3 The panel has now completed a series of meetings focussed toward gathering background information and information from internally provided services. This is therefore an opportune time to update the committee on the panel's progress. The attached notes of meeting provide an insight to the panel's in depth considerations and demonstrate the breadth of evidence gathered to this point.
- 2.4 Arrangements are being finalised for future meetings including those to hear evidence from young people and their representatives, specialist services and other councils. In addition to this the panel intends to carry out visits to some of the specialist services which support looked after children.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The scrutiny panel has started its work and undertaken information gathering at four meetings to date, with a series of further meetings organised for the new year. It is anticipated that the final report of the panel will be presented to the committee in March 2016.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is recommended that committee note the progress made by the scrutiny panel to date and its programme of meetings for 2016.



.....
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Date: 23 November 2015

Contact Name: Jack Frawley

EXT 6116

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 506116 and ask for Jack Frawley

Scrutiny Panel: OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The scope of this scrutiny process will be to examine outcomes for looked after children. Why, if at all, are outcomes for looked after children are different from their non-looked after peers and are there differences between different groups of looked after children, i.e. those with Special Educational Needs, those looked after away from home, looked after at home, in residential care and foster care etc.?

The scrutiny will be undertaken by

Cllr C Meiklejohn (Chair)
 Cllr C Chalmers
 Cllr G Hughes
 Cllr J McLuckie
 Provost P Reid

The Panel will be supported by the following officers:

Robert Naylor – Director of Children’s Services
 Fiona Campbell - Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
 Colin Moodie – Depute Chief Governance Officer

The review will be supported by the following officers:

Frank Kennedy – Service Manager Children and Families
 David Mackay – Pupil Support Service Manager

A pack of information will be provided to the Panel. TBC

The suggested timetable of panel meetings will be as follows:

| | Purpose of Meeting | Date/Venue | Attendees | Public/Private Meeting |
|---|--|------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| | Scoping Meeting Establish and agree the detailed scope of the scrutiny including establishing schedule of meetings/ visits / evidence and considering engagement with other elected Members. | 3 July 2015 Municipal Buildings | All Members of the Panel – except Provost Reid. All Officers noted above J Frawley – Governance K McCarroll – Chief SW Officer | Private |
| 1 | Presentations | 1 September 2015 | Members | Public |

| | Purpose of Meeting | Date/Venue | Attendees | Public/Private Meeting |
|---|---|---|---|------------------------|
| | <p>Background and Context</p> <p>Meeting one</p> <p>Members will be provided with a presentation to outline the background to the topic. In particular information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation – what makes a child looked after and what are our obligations; • looked after children in Falkirk – who are they and why are they looked after; • Role of reporter and children’s hearings; • Outcomes for looked after children and their non-looked after peers - comparisons to be made between different groups of looked after children and with looked after children across Scotland; • Cost of services; • What are the trends in the data – looking at Falkirk in comparison with the rest of Scotland and general trends; • Issues, challenges and opportunities | Committee Suite Municipal Buildings | <p>Colin Moodie Robert Naylor Fiona Campbell</p> <p>Presentations from David McKay Frank Kennedy Colin Moodie</p> | |
| 2 | <p>Presentations</p> <p>Service Perspective</p> <p>How the Council meets the needs of looked after children. – what are the successes and challenges in providing services to looked after children including an overview of the services provided specifically to looked after children and the challenges of looked after children accessing mainstream services.</p> <p>Presentations from the perspective of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Social work • Housing • Transitions – Positive and sustained destinations | 22 nd September 2015 Committee Suite Municipal Buildings | <p>Presentations from services</p> <p>TBC</p> | Public |

| | Purpose of Meeting | Date/Venue | Attendees | Public/Private Meeting |
|----------|--|---|---|-------------------------------|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Parent responsibilities | | | |
| 3 | Presentation and Discussion Views of young people and their representatives Meeting focussed on understanding the needs of looked after children. This session will focus on engaging with young people, with the Panel meeting with young people and their representatives / advocates. The purpose of this is to understand issues that are important to young people, what impacts on them and what would make a difference to them. | October 2015 Confirmation on the time for this meeting | Presentations from Children's Rights Officers Who Cares and Looked after children | TBC |
| 4 | Presentations Specialist Services Understanding specific needs of looked after young people and specialist services that are in place to support them. Presentations from the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cluaran Intensive Family Support Services LAC Psychologist Through care and after care. | Early February | TBC | tbc |
| 5 | Engagement with all Members | February | TBC | |

| | Purpose of Meeting | Date/Venue | Attendees | Public/Private Meeting |
|----------|---|-------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| | Areas of engagement to be confirmed but potentially around the role and way forward with regards corporate parenting etc. | | | |
| 6 | Visit and Discussion Visits to some specialist services developed for looked after children. What do specialist units provide, why these services are necessary and how to they support looked after children. Visits to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mariners Service – behavioural support • Parents Group at Mariners • Tremmanna • Meeting with reps from Foster Care Consultative Committee | Mid February | TBC | tbc |
| 7 | Presentations What do other Council's do to support their looked after children including the services they provide, the way they organise to support Corporate Parenting and also any challenges they see in the future supporting looked after children. It is proposed that the following Councils are invited to give presentations to the Panel: Perth and Kinross East Renfrewshire North Lanarkshire. | Late February | Perth and Kinross East Renfrewshire North Lanarkshire | Public |
| 8 | Conclusion Final meeting for Members to discuss and determine recommendations based on previous sessions and the evidence provided. Members consider recommendations based on the evidence heard and the discussions at previous meetings. This will include an | March | | Private |

| | Purpose of Meeting | Date/Venue | Attendees | Public/Private Meeting |
|----------|--|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| | assessment for value for money, quality of service, perceived areas of good practice and development. | | | |
| 9 | Recommendations to Scrutiny Committee and thereafter to the Executive. Present findings and recommendations of Scrutiny Panel to Elected Members | TBC | Members | Public |

FALKIRK COUNCIL

NOTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY PANEL – OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on FRIDAY 3 JULY 2015 at 3.00 PM.

COUNCILLORS:

Colin Chalmers
Gordon Hughes
John McLuckie
Cecil Meiklejohn (Convener)

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head Of Policy, Technology & Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Officer
Frank Kennedy, Service Manager
David Mackay, Pupil Support Service Manager
Kathy McCarroll, Head of Children & Families and Criminal Justice
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was intimated on behalf of Provost Reid.

2. SCRUTINY PANEL SCOPE

Panel members and officers introduced themselves and explained their respective roles in relation to the work of the panel; thereafter Councillor Meiklejohn assumed the chair.

The panel considered a draft scoping document and scrutiny panel guidance. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the work scrutiny panels typically undertake. She stated that a review of the scrutiny panel guidance would be undertaken shortly. She advised that the work of a scrutiny panel was to review policy and practice. The panel were warned against some of the possible pitfalls such as having an unrealistic or unmanageable work programme. Further, it was important that the panel kept on task and was not pulled in too many directions. She advised the panel that it could recommend pieces of further work to be undertaken in the future if necessary.

Fiona Campbell highlighted the context to the panel including: the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014; the creation of the new Children's Service; that the service was due an inspection in autumn 2015; discussions on looked after children at the performance panel, and Councillors as corporate parents. This scoping meeting was held in order to ensure that the panel had a plan for its work going forward. It was important that the panel gathered the right evidence. She stated that the panel could hear from Council officers, get factual information, meet with stakeholders and hear from expert witnesses. Fiona Campbell also highlighted the importance of sticking to the timescale. She advised that the

panel would be attended by two types of officers: those to support the work of the panel as advisors and experts from the service.

Fiona Campbell provided details on the planned meetings of the panel. The second meeting of the panel would receive a background and context briefing from Frank Kennedy and David Mackay as experts in the field. In response to a question about the format of the meeting, Fiona Campbell stated that a pack of background information would be provided to members in advance of the meeting and that the meeting would consist of a presentation followed by questions and discussion.

Members discussed whether the meeting should be held in public or private due to the sensitivity of the issue. The panel was minded to receive the presentation in public. The panel members then discussed what they hoped to get out of the process and that the panel needed to identify if looked after children were being provided with care which allowed them to achieve the best possible outcomes. Fiona Campbell stated that the scoping document was a flexible document and that the direction of the panel would be under review following each meeting if necessary.

At the third meeting of the panel Fiona Campbell advised that the Council's three services would each be invited to present to the panel in relation to their work with looked after children. The panel asked if they would also receive information from external organisations such as Forth Valley College. Fiona Campbell stated that information regarding the college would be included in the background pack being provided to members for the next meeting. Members then asked about having the employment training unit feed into the process. Fiona Campbell stated that transitions for looked after children would be covered and that Steve Dougan, Support Officer liaises with the college. At the request of the panel, services would be briefed to ensure that their presentations included information on where practice had been improved or changed.

The panel asked a question to clarify the age to which the Council has a duty of responsibility to looked after children. Colin Moodie stated that in relation to the new legal duties accompanying the introduction of corporate parenting would be covered in the form of a briefing note on the legislative side of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and that this would be supplemented by information on the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011. The panel also discussed monitoring and tracking arrangements regarding attainment.

Fiona Campbell stated that it was proposed that at the fourth meeting of the panel young people and advocates are invited to attend to allow engagement with young people with the purpose of understanding the issues which are important to them. For the fifth meeting of the panel it was proposed that presentations are received from a number of specialist and intensive support services. The following meeting would involve the panel making visits to some specialist services developed for looked after children. David Mackay asked the panel if they would find it beneficial when visiting the Mariners Support Service – behavioural support to meet with parents, the panel agreed that would be very valuable and noted that parents have different challenges.

The subsequent meeting of the panel would look at what other Councils do to support their looked after children. It was proposed that speakers from other authorities were invited to present to the panel on the services they provide and the way they organise

support for corporate parents. It was proposed that Perth & Kinross, East Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire Councils are invited to present.

The panel would then have a conclusions meeting to make sure that it had covered the areas it had sought to and to agree its recommendations. Fiona Campbell advised that recommendations from the panel would first be presented to the scrutiny committee and then, following consideration at committee, the next stage would be for referral to the Executive.

Colin Moodie raised that in previous panels the wider body of elected members had been engaged for their opinions, he suggested that all members could be e-mailed for their views or invited to attend a meeting. He stated that this could be done later on in the process once the issues were clearer and that doing so would reflect that all elected members are corporate parents.

The panel discussed arrangements for the meeting where young people and advocates would be invited and suggested that it might be preferable to have the meeting take place in the evening to make attendance more convenient. Fiona Campbell and Kathy McCarroll would liaise to take forward arrangements in the most suitable way.

The panel discussed dates for future meetings and agreed the dates for the first two meetings as:

- 1 September 2015 at 2pm, and
- 22 September 2015 at 2pm.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

NOTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY PANEL – OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on TUESDAY 1 SEPTEMBER 2015 at 2.00 PM.

COUNCILLORS:

Colin Chalmers
Gordon Hughes
John McLuckie
Cecil Meiklejohn (Convener)
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head Of Policy, Technology & Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Officer
Frank Kennedy, Service Manager
David Mackay, Pupil Support Service Manager
Kathy McCarroll, Head of Children & Families and Criminal Justice
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. PRESENTATIONS

The panel was provided with a presentation by Colin Moodie on the legal context and legal considerations regarding looked after children and service delivery. The presentation covered the following points:

- the definition of looked after children at home and away from home;
- an explanation of key jargon used in the field;
- information on the Children's Panel and Child Protection Register;
- details of the process of permanence orders and adoption;
- an overview of the most relevant legislation including the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014;
- statistical information on the number of looked after children locally and in other authorities;
- a breakdown of the placement types nationally and in Falkirk Council, and
- information on the duties of corporate parents.

The panel asked if the number of young people who could ask for continuing care was known. Kathy McCarroll advised that as the Act had only come into force this year the uptake of provision was not yet known, but that the service had identified ten young people who were eligible. She stated that if a young person left care before they were fifteen and a half they would not be eligible for continuing care. Continuing care related to financial and peer support. She made reference to the issue of homelessness and that some former looked after children struggled to find suitable housing as hostel provision did not

meet their needs. The Council does not have specialist housing provision for former looked after children, but were looking at options around this.

Members discussed the age limit for receiving continuing care. Kathy McCarroll stated that the provision was part of the Act and that there was not guidance on the matter. Who Cares? Scotland had lobbied the Scottish Government on the issue of the maximum age for after care. This age could be increased in specific cases by order of the Minister. The panel were advised that it was unusual for young people who were near the maximum age to have their care order ended as they were not old enough to voluntarily leave the service.

The panel discussed the role of the Children's Hearing system and public perception of Children's Panel members. A question was asked regarding whether or not the Children's Panel could determine what type of placement a child was given. Kathy McCarroll stated that the Children's Panel was able to recommend placement in a residential school but it needed to be assessed as an appropriate placement for that child. A social worker would determine if the child could cope in particular settings and if a place was available. She further clarified the differences between residential care and a residential school, the latter of which provided care and education at one location.

In response to a question on the higher proportionate use of residential facilities in Falkirk compared with the national average, Colin Moodie advised that a lot of work would be required to unpick why that was the case. He highlighted that although there were more looked after children away from home, there were less children in total looked after in Falkirk proportionately, when compared to the national average.

The panel asked if there was a lack of facilities and foster carers locally. Kathy McCarroll advised that the service was negotiating with providers to increase the number of local residential placements available. It was anticipated that there would be eight additional beds provided. She advised that the service continually sought to increase the number of foster carers in the area and that word of mouth had proven to be the most successful recruitment method. In partnership with Falkirk Football Club some free advertising had been accessed at football matches with leaflets handed out. Fiona Campbell advised that Falkirk had a higher number of foster carers than the national average.

Members then sought information on the types of relationships involved in kinship care situations. Kathy McCarroll stated that in most cases the child was looked after by a grandparent and that in almost all instances, it was a family member.

The panel discussed the recruitment and retention of foster carers exploring what approach was taken by other Councils and levels of remuneration. Kathy McCarroll informed the panel of the three levels of payment to foster carers in Falkirk, which were dependent on experience. Further to the basic rate, foster carers received an age related allowance for each child in their care. She advised that all Councils take a different approach and that currently foster carers were exempt from claiming benefits, but that this may change under universal credit. In terms of recruitment and retention there was pressure from competition with private agencies. The service heard from current foster carers that money was not their main motivation and that they believed the Council offered the best training and support to foster carers in the area.

There was discussion on outcomes achieved by placement type and that children looked after away from home generally had better outcomes than those looked after at home.

The panel thanked Colin Moodie for his presentation.

The panel was then provided with a presentation by Frank Kennedy and David Mackay on outcomes for looked after children. The presentation covered the following points:

- statistical information on the number of looked after children;
- information on the national picture regarding placement types used;
- school attendance, exclusion rates, tariff scores, and positive destinations for children looked after at home and away from home;
- placement costs and the stability of such placements, and
- anonymous case studies.

The panel further discussed recruitment of foster carers. Kathy McCarroll advised that on average it took between 80 and 100 hours to assess someone as a foster carer from their expression of interest to making a placement. Initially interest parties were invited to an information evening, which was held twice a year.

Members asked what the future pathways were for looked after children who entered secure units and if they were placed into other care. Kathy McCarroll stated that the procedures were robust and the Chief Social Work Officer had to take a view on the best provision with the head of the unit. There was a weekly review of this and a further three monthly review by the Children's Panel. Frank Kennedy informed the panel about the transition process undertaken with children in secure units to make any future move go positively. Kathy McCarroll advised that generally the pathway was to a residential placement first and then home when appropriate.

Provost Reid left the meeting at this point.

The panel discussed additional support needs and asked about the provision made available to looked after children in this area. Frank Kennedy stated that there were contracts with other providers of family support services and their role was to intervene and prevent a situation resulting in a child becoming looked after. David Mackay stated that the Council had a robust exclusion policy and that before the decision was taken to exclude a looked after child there must be discussion with the service manager. Schools were supported and challenged with the aim of increasing attendance as that would lead to better outcomes and more positive destinations.

Members asked if former looked after children could be given higher priority on the housing list. Fiona Campbell advised that a presentation would be given at a future meeting of the panel from Housing.

The panel discussed that for a future meeting on specialist services an invitation could be made to the NHS. Kathy McCarroll stated that the looked after children psychologist was scheduled to present as part of the specialist services meeting. The psychologist was funded by the Council although remained an NHS employee but the Council was able to determine which young people were prioritised. Further, the Council had determined the content of the job specification when the post was created. Fiona Campbell advised that during previous discussion at the scrutiny committee there had been consideration of whether or not the post should be funded by the Council, NHS or a joint funded project.

The panel thanked Frank Kennedy and David Mackay for their presentation.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

NOTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY PANEL – OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on TUESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2015 at 2.00 PM.

COUNCILLORS:

Gordon Hughes
John McLuckie
Cecil Meiklejohn (Convener)
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head Of Policy and ICT Improvement
Steve Dougan, Senior Phase/Opportunities for All
Coordinator
Jack Frawley, Committee Officer
Peter Graham, Principal Teacher
Elizabeth Hood, Neighbourhood & Access to Housing
Manager
Frank Kennedy, Service Manager
Jennifer Litts, Head of Housing
David Mackay, Pupil Support Service Manager
Cathy Megarry, Service Manager
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive
Vivien Thomson, Service Manager

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Chalmers.

2. NOTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The panel approved the note of the meeting of 1 September 2015.

3. SERVICE PRESENTATIONS

(a) Oxgang School Support Service

The panel were provided with a presentation from the perspective of education by David Mackay, Pupil Support Service Manager.

The panel discussed the impact of attendance on attainment and the need for early intervention. David Mackay advised that there was an internal looked after children scrutiny group which meet on a six weekly basis to monitor those pupils with attendance below 80%. The service also asked schools for predicted grades, including at primary, in order to track progress. There was work ongoing to address the discrepancy in attendance

rates between children looked after at home and those looked after away from home, the latter generally having higher rates of attendance.

Members discussed the Oxbang School and Support Service. David Mackay advised that the provision had been adapted to give an enhanced offering in relation to nurture and that the school had been recognised as an example of good practice. He highlighted that where there had been behavioural challenges these had related to emotion expression difficulties. The school was working closely with families and had an open door policy with parents. In relation to a question on children moving from the school to mainstream, David Mackay stated that since the start of the spring term 3 children had entered mainstream with ongoing support.

The panel then discussed measures in place to avoid exclusions in mainstream and commented on the duty to provide high quality education to all children. David Mackay advised that schools have a range of options available to them such as staged interventions, detention, removal to other classes and nurture provision. However, he advised that in the case of a significant event, such as a violent incident, the options open to the school are restricted as safety is a key priority. In response to a question on the differences in exclusion rates between looked after children and others, the panel were advised that looked after children were 7 to 8 times more likely to be excluded. Robert Naylor advised that there had been a recent policy change which meant that no looked after child could be excluded without reference to central management.

The panel thanked David Mackay for his informative presentation.

(b) Strengths and Challenges in Meeting the Needs of Looked After Children: A Social Work Perspective

The panel were provided with a presentation from the perspective of social work by Cathy Megarry, Service Manager.

The panel discussed mental health services provision to young people and asked about Government funding for these services. Vivien Thomson stated that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) had bid for funding and that Kathy McCarroll was liaising with the service to discuss best use of the funding. Cathy Megarry made reference to the partnership work which was carried out by the team around the child which included teachers, social workers, health professionals and the family. The group works to plan the best support for a young person. For looked after children a more formal review process is also undertaken.

Members discussed the provision of accommodation for children and young people and highlighted that some units allowed young people to be part of a wider community but others were in quite isolated settings. Cathy Megarry stated that it was important to have a range of services to meet a range of needs. She advised that children looked after in rural settings were able to access local community facilities through transport arrangements and buses. She stated that the feedback received by the service was that children in rural settings were as happy as those accommodated in towns and that both settings have resulted in positive outcomes.

The panel discussed transitions and the use of halfway houses. Cathy Megarry stated that there was work to be done in this area particularly in relation to corporate parenting

responsibilities. Vivien Thomson advised that discussions had begun regarding the provision of a move-on flat at the Tremanna unit. Cathy Megarry stated that children's plans were now more outcome focussed and that through the introduction of new legislation the voice of young people had a more prominent part in influencing services. The service was increasing the provision of residential care in central Falkirk by four beds and there were two additional beds being brought on stream in Denny.

Members then discussed the emotional impact of this work on staff and asked about case loads. Cathy Megarry advised that there were 290 live cases with each team and that the service had robust supervision processes in place including a one-to-one with staff at least once a month. All team managers are accessible to their staff and teams support each other. There is further work carried out in relation to training and induction and the service recognised that the work does take a toll.

The panel thanked Cathy Megarry for her informative presentation.

(c) Positive Destinations

The panel were provided with a presentation by Steve Dougan, Senior Phase/Opportunities for All Coordinator.

The panel discussed the challenge of the wider economic climate on achieving positive destinations and commented that a number of positive destinations reported were not sustained. Steve Dougan stated that the information provided was on school leaver destinations, previously provided by Skills Development Scotland, and that participation measures tracked young people up to 20 years old. In the previous two weeks the most recent statistics had been released. The service sought to obtain the names of those included in the data in order to liaise with schools and identify if positive destinations had been maintained. He advised that if former looked after young people became unemployed and registered at the Job Centre Plus then the Council was informed of this. The employment training unit continued to advertise and make opportunities available to young people. In trying to achieve positive destinations the service had redesigned its careers information provision to allow young people to talk of their aspirations and work toward meeting them. However, the service also monitored labour market opportunities to ensure that what a young person wanted was achievable. Mary Pitcaithly assured the panel that the service was focussed on ensuring that no young person slipped through the cracks in provision by being as joined up with partners as possible. She also advised that the Council gave priority to care leavers in its modern apprentice scheme.

The panel thanked Steve Dougan for his informative presentation.

(d) Using Data to Help “Get It Right For Every Child”

The panel were provided with a presentation by Peter Graham, Principal Teacher, Denny High School.

The panel asked what extra support was provided to looked after children as they were at a high level on the risk matrix. Peter Graham advised that the tracker tool highlighted weekly progress. As looked after children approached their leaving date they were taken to speak with both further education and higher education institutions. From the next school session a UCAS portal would be provided. The service sought to ensure that looked after

and former looked after children identify themselves as such on application forms. In relation to years one and two he advised that if a child was looked after then this was included in their pupil profile and the Heads of House do social education with looked after children to raise aspirations.

Members asked about the numbers of looked after children who progressed onto further and higher education. Peter Graham advised that after the meeting he could provide the information for those from Denny High School and Steve Dougan information for the Council area. In relation to a question on the challenge of transition to a university environment, Peter Graham stated that Stirling University had been proactive in asking the Council to be told which applicants were looked after so that they could put support in place. Further, universities can access additional funding to support looked after students. Steve Dougan stated that there had been discussions about the possibility of a summer school to aid transition.

The panel thanked Peter Graham for his informative presentation.

(e) Housing

The panel were provided with a presentation from the perspective of housing by Elizabeth Hood, Access to Housing Manager.

The panel discussed the transition for looked after young people when entering independent accommodation for the first time. They highlighted that being allocated a tenancy close to people with chaotic lives can cause conflict and negatively affect looked after young people who are on a transitional journey. They discussed the provision of halfway house options for the move from school and residential as moving to independent accommodation was a lot to deal with at one time. They also highlighted that the bidding process could be intimidating and asked if the service provided support to secure the most appropriate type of tenancy.

Robert Naylor stated that there were currently gaps in the provision such as in relation to halfway houses. He highlighted that for young people in Tremanna there was the option of moving to the flat next door and to then move to a supported tenancy as a staged process.

Members raised concern in relation to care leavers becoming isolated and suggested that a group home setting would fill a gap. Jennifer Litts stated that the average age for a young person to leave the family home is 26, whereas it is often expected that a looked after young person will maintain a tenancy at a much younger age. She advised that the position had been to not separate provision for homeless people and looked after young people but that if the view of the Council was that these groups should not be mixed then arrangements would be reviewed. The current set up was for generic mixed provision. She stated that there was a key worker who made bids for looked after young people and that informed decisions were taken about where these young people should move to, for example if they should be placed near to their family etc.

(f) Corporate Parenting

The panel agreed to continue consideration of the presentation to a further meeting to allow full consideration of the topic.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

NOTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY PANEL – OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on FRIDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2015 at 2.30 PM.

COUNCILLORS: Gordon Hughes
John McLuckie
Cecil Meiklejohn (convener)
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS: Fiona Campbell, Head Of Policy and ICT Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive
Vivien Thomson, Service Manager

1. APOLOGIES

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Chalmers.

2. NOTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The panel approved the note of the meeting of 22 September 2015.

3. CORPORATE PARENTING PRESENTATION

The panel were provided with a presentation by Robert Naylor and Fiona Campbell on corporate parenting (attached to this note), it covered the following points:-

- what is a corporate parent – roles and responsibilities in legislation and good practice;
- where we are on the journey in Falkirk;
- brief overview of approach to corporate parenting and in particular champions, and
- way forward for corporate parenting in Falkirk.

The panel sought clarification on which organisations had responsibilities as corporate parents. Mary Pitcaithly advised that the organisations on the Falkirk Community Planning Partnership were corporate parents and highlighted work carried out by Falkirk Community Trust with looked after children and the arts. Vivien Thomson stated that there were twenty four organisations listed in the guidance with corporate parenting responsibilities. Mary Pitcaithly advised that the Council was working actively in this area with both the employment training unit and community and learning development making significant contributions.

The panel discussed funding for projects to support looked after children across the partnership. It was noted that the looked after children's psychologist was solely funded by the Council. The panel discussed the referral process to the looked after children's

psychologist, waiting times and qualifying criteria to access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Members expressed concern that the requirement to have been diagnosed with a mental health condition prevented many people accessing the service who needed it. Vivien Thomson advised that young people were able to access the looked after children's psychologist service without an existing diagnosis of mental illness and that a consultation was offered by CAMHS to young people following an attempt to take their own life.

Members discussed the role of Police Scotland in signposting and highlighted the valuable work carried out by community constables. Fiona Campbell stated that it would be useful to know if Police Scotland were aware of which children and young people in a community are looked after. She stated that Police Scotland was developing national guidance on its approach to corporate parenting. Robert Naylor advised that national organisations were able to develop national plans. The panel commented that the police had an important role to play in early intervention and contributing to a multi-agency approach.

The panel raised concern regarding challenges around the housing bidding process for looked after young people, a suggestion was made that looked after young people could get prioritised for certain areas and suitable housing. It was noted that Jennifer Litts, Head of Housing was undertaking work in this area.

The panel then discussed the approach for Falkirk to a potential Champions Board. Fiona Campbell advised that there was an increasing shift toward champions boards and that Dundee Council was considered an example of best practice nationally. The approach taken by a number of authorities had been considered and information on the format at Argyll & Bute Council; Leicestershire County Council; Lancashire County Council; Midlothian Council, and Dundee City Council. She noted that a proposal would be developed by the strategy group in the new year following determination of funding.

Fiona Campbell stated that the strategy group was working with a number of key principles, namely:-

- engage children and young people;
- develop a model that is sustainable and not tokenistic;
- engage with partners, and
- consider the role of members.

The panel discussed the approach to be taken locally and highlighted a number of points, including:-

- that the model selected should not be too intrusive into a young person's life;
- that members role should be to provide strategic direction and not line manage officers;
- that different approaches may be required for children looked after at home and for those for whom the Council was the main parent;
- that members should most likely not be directly involved with looked after young people but could have a role in monitoring their progress and wellbeing, and
- that a former looked after child should be a member of any champions board.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: SCRUTINY PLAN UPDATE
Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date: 3 DECEMBER 2015
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress made against the Scrutiny Plan for 2015. The report also invites the Committee to consider the establishment of a second Scrutiny Panel.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Committee considered a report at its meeting of 14 May 2015 inviting establishment of a Scrutiny Panel from the topics agreed by Council at its meeting of 11 March 2015 (ref FC78). The Committee agreed to establish a Scrutiny Panel to consider outcomes for looked after children.
- 2.2 The progress of the Scrutiny Panel on outcomes for looked after children has been reported earlier in the agenda and in light of this the Committee is asked to consider establishment of its next Scrutiny Panel.
- 2.3 The Scrutiny Plan, as agreed by Council, contains one further area identified for in depth scrutiny which is:-
- the operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered and lessons learned for the future. The scope of the Scrutiny Panel would include customer feedback as well as formal complaints.
- 2.4 The current Scrutiny Panel is on track to be ready to report in March 2016. It is recommended that the Committee agree to establish the panel on the operation of the complaints system to begin its work from March 2016.
- 2.5 Prior to commencement of the Scrutiny Panel on the operation of the complaints system it is recommended that nominations for membership are provided to the Chief Governance Officer in order that the panel may commence its work immediately upon the conclusion of the outcomes for looked after children panel.
- 2.6 There remains a third vacant slot on the Scrutiny Plan which requires to be filled and the revised plan then submitted to Council for approval. It is requested that the Committee consider what, if any, further information they require in order to identify a third topic for the Scrutiny Plan.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Committee is invited to:-

- (i) establish a Scrutiny Panel on the operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered and lessons learned for the future. The scope of the Scrutiny Panel will include customer feedback as well as formal complaints;
- (ii) provide nominations for this panel to the Chief Governance Officer, and
- (iii) request further information as necessary in order to determine the topic to be included as the third item on the 2015 annual Scrutiny Plan.

.....
DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES
Date: 18 November 2015
Ref: AAC031215 – Scrutiny Plan Update
Contact Officer: Jack Frawley, Committee Officer, Ext. 6116

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: AUDIT SCOTLAND: AUDITING BEST VALUE – A NEW APPROACH
Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date: 3 DECEMBER 2015
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report updates Members on the thinking of the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland on the future of Best Value and Best Value audits. A letter from Douglas Sinclair Chair of the Accounts Commission is attached which notes the work commissioned by Audit Scotland in reviewing its approach to best value which is then further outlined in this report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Last week the Chair of the Accounts Commission wrote to Council Leaders to provide an update on the Commission's review of the audit of Best Value. This was followed up by correspondence from Audit Scotland outlining how they are taking the new arrangements forward.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that the requirement to secure best value was introduced for Councils as part of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 along with the duty of well-being and a responsibility for community planning. In those early days, the achievement of best value was assessed as part of the external auditor's review of the Council. This was developed into a Performance Management and Planning assessment and then into a full audit approach which was extended to cover community planning.
- 2.3 In order to ensure Best Value is being delivered Audit Scotland many years ago provided a range of toolkits which they used as part of their audit process. These checklists covered the following range of areas:
- Asset management
 - Challenge and improvement
 - Community engagement
 - Customer focus
 - Effective partnership
 - Efficiency
 - Equalities
 - Financial management
 - Governance and accountability
 - Information management
 - People management
 - Performance management

- Planning and resource alignment
 - Procurement
 - Public performance reporting
 - Risk management
 - Sustainability; and
 - Vision and strategic direction.
- 2.4 Each of the topics come together to provide a picture if a Council is approaching best value but is not prescriptive in that approach. This has led to a great deal of flexibility in the way a Council approaches its best value obligations and this to an extent has been reflected in the subsequent audit reports.
- 2.5 Falkirk Council has had two best value audits since 2003 - one in 2007 and the latest being reported this year. Every year external auditors undertake a shared risk assessment of Councils which identifies areas of risk or uncertainty. This risk assessment results in either future improvement actions being identified or can in some circumstances result in specific targeted inspections or audits. Members will recall that it was the result of previous shared risk assessments of the Council that highlighted the need to look further at the Council's decision making processes and also performance management arrangements through a 'targeted' best value audit.

3. REVIEW OF AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.1 There have always been issues about the proportionately of best value audits and questions over the scope and focus of these, in addition to the other audit and inspections local authorities and their partners are subject to. Members will recall that a review of audit and inspection was carried out by the Government some years ago with a commitment to proportionality. Latterly there has been discussion about how best value can best be demonstrated and particularly if a traditional audit approach can measure this.
- 3.2 In order to respond to these questions, the Accounts Commission have asked Audit Scotland to review its approach to Best Value.
- 3.3 The Commission's review has identified opportunities to improve the current arrangements and it has set out a number of principles for the development of Best Value audit arrangements in the future. These are:
- The essential elements of Best Value remain as relevant and critically important today as when it was first established, although there is some need for the statutory guidance on Best Value to be reviewed;
 - There is a real need for the pace, depth and continuity of improvement to increase across local government and driving improvement will be at the core of the audit process for Best Value;
 - There can be no compromise on the importance of good governance in Councils, including the need for effective scrutiny arrangements that contain the checks and balances which lie at the heart of our system of government;
 - A proportionate and risk-based audit approach should be taken, but the Commission requires more frequent assurance on Best Value across all 32 Councils;

- Greater synergy, and a better experience for Councils, can be achieved through integrating audit processes across the range of audit work applied in local government, alongside continued joined up working with other scrutiny bodies; and
 - Audit work should have a strong focus on the quality of service experienced by the public and the outcomes achieved by councils for their communities.
- 3.4 Audit Scotland has started a programme of work to develop the new approach to auditing Best Value and discussions with the Scottish Government about refreshing the statutory guidance have begun.
- 3.5 The new arrangements will develop over time. The Commission and Audit Scotland will maintain dialogue with stakeholders on the approach and develop and refine the arrangements on an on-going basis. It is anticipated that auditors will consider Best Value audit work as part of the shared risk assessment process and planned Best Value audits will continue to take place during 2016/17.
- 3.6 The new approach will mean much greater integration of the range of audit work taking place in Councils. Auditing Best Value will be undertaken alongside the annual audit process and reported through the Annual Audit Reports to Members and to the Controller of Audit. Each year, a number of Best Value themes will be included in the annual audit process, with a summary reported to the Accounts Commission at the end of each year.
- 3.7 The new approach will retain the principle of being proportionate and risk based but with more regular assurance provided to the Commission. Next autumn, the new five year audit appointments begin. At least once during the five year appointment, a Best Value assurance report will be produced for each Council, reported to the Accounts Commission and published. The Commission will consider the first of these reports in Spring 2017. This report will be a collective picture of the evidence from the annual audit work, other audit and scrutiny activity and any specific Best Value audit work required to complete a picture of Best Value in a Council.
- 3.8 Audit Scotland have advised that the new approach to auditing Best Value will have a clear focus on improvement and outcomes, including service user's experience. The audit work will consider the effectiveness of a Council's approach to self-evaluation, its improvement plans, supporting performance management, review activity and leadership of improvement. Members will appreciate these are all areas included within the improvement plan agreed by Council in October.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Audit Scotland anticipates that the approach noted above will provide a better experience for Councils with a more rounded picture of Best Value at each Council and across all Councils resulting. There are indications that this will enable Audit Scotland to identify both poorer and stronger performance in relation to Best Value criteria and therefore support improvement more effectively. It is important though that the flexibly to approach Best Value in a way that makes sense locally needs to be central to this approach. Audit Scotland and other audit partners will be looking at more regular engagement and integrated planning and audit activity which will enhance the depth of understanding about each Council and the richness of their reporting, without adding additional layers of audit activity.
- 4.2 Officers have started to engage with Audit Scotland on this work and will when the process is further developed report back to Members outlining the exact implications for the Council and indeed practical issues such as reporting etc.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 **It is recommended that Members note the content of the report.**

.....
DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

Date: 25 November 2015

Ref: ABC1215FC – Best Value Audit

Contact Name: Fiona Campbell

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 506230 and ask for Fiona Campbell.

4th Floor
102 West Port
Edinburgh EH3 9DN

T: 0131 625 1500
E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



Dear

I am writing to update you on the Commission's review of its audit of Best Value.

It has been eleven years since the Commission launched the audit. The audit fulfils the Commission's responsibility, under the 2003 Local Government in Scotland Act, to hold councils to account and report on the extent to which they comply with their Best Value duties. Since then, we have periodically reviewed our approach. Following the legislation, we applied the Audit of Best Value and Community Planning across all 32 councils between 2004 and 2009. From 2009, the audit became more risk-based and proportionate.

In more recent years, we have been reporting in our recent annual overview reports about the changing and complex challenges faced by local government in the midst of the current political, demographic and financial environment. We need to assure ourselves that our auditing work around Best Value is fully responsive to such a landscape and, as a consequence, we are reviewing our approach to auditing Best Value.

We believe that we - and councils and the public - can get more from our Best Value work. It enables the Commission to get a better appreciation of how councils contribute to improved outcomes for their citizens and communities. In doing so, we want to better reflect the extent of councils fulfilling their responsibilities in partnership with other agencies and the experience of the citizen and service user in their interaction with their council. Finally, we need an approach to audit that recognises the need for councils to be applying preventative approaches in the provision of services.

We want councils to be fully engaged in our design of the audit arrangements. We believe that an updated approach to auditing Best Value should be proportionate, risk-based and outcome-focused, enabling the public to assess the performance of their council over time and in comparison with similar councils. Given the scale of the challenges currently faced by councils, there is a need for the pace and depth of improvement to increase across local government, and an assessment of this should be at the audit's core. The new approach will be to reflect these themes and to provide the Commission and the public with regular assurance about the performance of all councils. The audit will make better use of the annual financial audit and the shared risk assessment process, and will continue to support our working with our strategic scrutiny partners.

We have recommended to the Scottish Government and COSLA the desirability of reiterating the basis of Best Value. We believe that Best Value is as relevant and vital today as it was when it was introduced. The initial phase of our review has identified that having a solid legislative basis for the audit of Best Value has been a powerful factor in its credibility and impact, and is still relevant given the passage of time since it was introduced. There needs to be a clear consensus and understanding that the statutory guidance is still relevant to local government and its services. In our view, therefore, there is merit in consideration being given to the guidance being revised, refreshed or reiterated to ensure its applicability to the issues that will be facing councils in the coming years. The Cabinet Secretary has indicated his agreement with our view.

Audit Scotland has commenced a programme of development work to respond to the Commission's review. Work is underway to develop a new approach to auditing Best Value and discussions with the Scottish Government and COSLA about refreshing the statutory guidance have begun. The team leading this programme will engage with stakeholders throughout. They will be in touch with your chief executive in the next week or so.

Meantime, if you have any queries about the review, then please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Sinclair
Chair

Copied to: Chief Executive