

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the PERFORMANCE PANEL held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2013 at 9.30 AM.

CORE MEMBERS: Allyson Black
Baillie Joan Paterson
Depute Provost Patrick

MEMBERS

ATTENDING: David Alexander
Stephen Bird
Tom Coleman
Gerry Goldie
Craig Martin
John McLuckie
John McNally
Cecil Meiklejohn
Malcolm Nicol
Alan Nimmo
Provost Pat Reid
Ann Ritchie
Sandy Turner

OFFICERS: Margaret Anderson, Director of Social Work Services
Alex Black, Quality Improvement Manager
Paul Ferguson, Revenue Manager
John Flannigan, Depute Chief Finance Officer
Arlene Fraser, Committee Services Officer
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Jennifer Litts, Head of Housing
Robert McMaster, Head of Roads and Design
Kenny McNeil, Educational Resources Manager
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Philip Morgan Klein, Service Manager
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive

ALSO ATTENDING: Lisa Duthie, Audit Scotland

PP1. APPOINTMENT OF CONVENER

The Chief Executive welcomed members to the first meeting of the Performance Panel which had been set up by the Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise services' performance. The panel consisted of a core decision making membership of 5 elected members with all members of Council able to attend and participate. It was envisaged that the distinction between the 'core' members and participating members would not arise often as the Panel was not a decision making body.

The Chief Executive sought nominations from the core membership for the position of convener. Prior to discussion Councillors Meiklejohn and Bird, confirmed that, having previously been nominated as the Opposition representatives on the core group of members, they now wished to withdraw their nominations.

Decision

The panel appointed Depute Provost Patrick as convener.

PP2. PERFORMANCE PANEL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

The panel considered a report by the Chief Governance Officer setting out the panel's timetable of meetings and reporting schedule.

Members discussed the role of the panel and, in particular, sought clarification on whether the panel could request best value reviews of services. These had previously been reported to the (former) Best Value Forum. The Chief Executive advised that although the remit of the panel was to scrutinise service performance it was not the successor to the Best Value Forum. The convener added that this was the first meeting of the panel and he anticipated that its role in terms of scrutinising service performance would develop. Issues raised would be recorded in the minute which would be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee as the parent body.

Following further discussion on the reporting structure, the Chief Executive advised that reports on the Corporate Plan and on Community Planning would be submitted to Council. Council could then refer these to the panel should it so wish.

The panel noted the report.

PP3. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION 2012/13 AND 2013/14 TO DATE

The panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services presenting individual service performance statements for the financial year 2012/13 and for the year 2013/14 to date.

The role of the Performance Panel was to scrutinise the performance of the Council's five services. Performance statements for the Chief Executive Office (Finance and Governance), Corporate and Neighbourhood Services, Development Services, Education Services and Social Work Services were presented. Each statement set out individual service's performance indicators together with the targets and performance for the year 2012/13 and 2013/14 to date.

Members then considered each statement in turn. A summary of the key discussion points and the outcome of the scrutiny is given below (key indicators are shown in bold):-

(i) Chief Executive Office – Finance

Paul Ferguson and John Flannigan gave an overview of the performance statement.

In regard to the indicator, **benefits administration – speed of processing new claims**, an explanation was sought on the rationale for increasing the target from 25 days in 2012/13 to 40 days in 2013/14 and whether such an increase was in the interest of claimants. Members also questioned whether the target was achievable in light of the figures provided for the year to date of 51.96 days. Mr Ferguson explained that the target had been revised in light of the impact of welfare reform on the service and on the introduction of new processes. It was anticipated that the target of 40 days was achievable and would be met by 31 March 2014.

Members considered performance in regard to **benefits administration – speed of processing change events** and sought assurance that the target of 20 days (for 2013/14) would be met. Again Mr Ferguson confirmed that performance would be in line with the target by the year end. Mr Ferguson also confirmed that, in regard to the indicator percentage of council house tenants owing more than £250 and 13 weeks rent, that early intervention had resulted in an improvement in performance.

The panel then scrutinised performance in regard to the indicator **percentage of incoming telephones answered promptly**. In particular members sought clarification of the definition of ‘promptly’ and whether there was a measure of whether calls were answered satisfactorily. The Council does undertake customer surveys but they did not include the measurement in regard to telephone calls.

Members noted an improved performance in 2013/14 in the **percentage of complaints responded to within 7 days** and asked what had caused this improvement. Mr Ferguson stated that as a key indicator dedicated resources had been put in place to manage complaints on a day to day basis.

The panel requested a report on the indicator benefits administration speed of processing new claims, including the factors impacting on performance and the appropriateness of increasing the performance target from 25 to 40 days.

The meeting then adjourned for 5 minutes and reconvened at 10.55 a.m. with all members present as per the sederunt with the exception of Baillie Paterson.

(ii) Chief Executive Office – Governance

Rose Mary Glackin gave an overview of the performance statement.

Questions focused on the indicator **percentage of members’ enquiries in accordance with agreed protocol**. Ms Glackin noted that the information provided was for the Governance section and did not represent the overall corporate performance. Members discussed the corporate response to members’ enquiries more generally and questioned the validity of the information provided.

In regard to the indicator **percentage of freedom of information requests responded to within 20 working days** members highlighted the benefit in providing, in addition to individual service performance information, the aggregate corporate response. The Chief Executive confirmed that information on corporate indicators such as response to members’ enquiries, response to Freedom Of Information (FOI) requests and absence statistics would be provided on a corporate level.

The panel noted the performance statement.

(iii) Corporate and Neighbourhood Services

Jennifer Litts gave an overview of the performance statement.

Members sought further contextual information detail in regard to the indicator; **number of apprentices and skillseekers recruited within the service.** The panel sought clarification in the rationale for a performance target of is in light of the performance of 65 in 2012/13 and the year to date performance of 33. Members enquired about the number of skillseekers and modern apprentices that are retained in employment by the Council. Members indicated that it would be useful for future reports to provide information on positive destinations for modern apprentices and skillseekers.

Members then questioned the performance in regard to the **percentage of customers who rate our services average or above,** in particular in reference to the condition of the property when let and sought the reasons as to why the target was not 100%. Ms Litts explained that the standard of the property would not always meet the tenant's expectations. The service was currently reviewing its standards for void properties and the cost implications of improving current standards.

The panel discussed the indicator **percentage of rent loss due to voids** and sought detail on the process for inspecting and approving void properties for let. Members explored whether there was a tension between the Council's desire to reduce the length of time a property is void and the need to ensure the property was let in a suitable condition. Members heard that the Council had committed funding within the capital programme to improving the condition of housing stock.

The panel discussed the process for assessing mental health enquiries as part of the assessment of applicants for housing needs. Ms Litts confirmed that an assessment of mental health needs was not carried out as part of the functional needs assessments and explained the context in which a person's mental health needs would be assessed.

The panel noted the performance statement.

(iv) Development Services

Rhona Geisler gave an overview of the performance statement.

In response to questions in regard to the **percentage of public buildings that are suitable and accessible to disabled people** and in particular as to why the target was not 100%; Mrs Geisler confirmed that the target of 78% was a national target and explained the Council's legal obligations in regard to disabled access. Members also sought confirmation of the **percentage of the schools estate which complied with legislative requirements** for disabled access.

As a general point the conveners requested that services identify whether targets are local or national.

Members sought clarification on whether the target **average time of 48 hours to attend domestic noise nuisance complaints** would be met by the year end and sought clarification on the distinction in approach between domestic and antisocial noise complaints.

Members then discussed the **recycling performance targets** and noted the work being undertaken to meet the targets. Mrs Geisler confirmed that the targets were set nationally and outlined initiatives being undertaken to meet the Council's targets. In response to a question Mrs Geisler stated that an increase of population did not necessarily contribute to a proportioned increase in tonnage of waste sent to landfill.

Members sought background information to the **number of businesses supported by the Business Gateway**, looking in particular at their size, employee profile and success rate.

In regard to questions on the percentage of non-householder planning applications dealt with within 2 months, Mrs Geisler confirmed that the number of applications was increasing and it was anticipated that this would continue with the availability of Tax incremental Funding (TiF).

The panel then discussed the **percentage of primary school children travelling actively to school i.e. walking or cycling** and sought confirmation that the Council had bid for funding to use the former Falkirk Denny railway line as a cycle/walking route. Mrs Geisler confirmed that a bid had been made and that the Council would continue to bid for external funding when it was available for such projects.

Mrs Geisler confirmed that there were excellent off road routes available within the area and that the service took a multi strand approach, with education a key strand.

In regard to the **percentage of operational buildings which were suitable for their current use** Mrs Geisler confirmed that the Municipal Buildings fell within this category and explained the criteria used to measure the performance indicator.

The panel noted the performance statement.

The panel agreed to continue consideration of the Education and Social Work Services performance statements to the next meeting on 27 January 2014.

PP4. SERVICE PERFORMANCE PANEL REPORTING

The panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services presenting a standard reporting format for approval.

The role of the panel was to scrutinise services performance. A draft report format had been developed to ensure a consistency in reporting across services. The report sets out:-

- progress on the Service Plan;
- service performance;
- service achievement;
- service improvement; and
- information on any impending major audit or inspection activity.

Members discussed the draft reporting format and its relationship with the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan. In response to a statement that the corporate plan should be a 'live' document, the Chief Executive confirmed that it was regularly reviewed and reported upon.

The panel agreed to adopt the draft performance reporting format as set out in the appendix to the report.