

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the PERFORMANCE PANEL held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 23 JANUARY 2014 at 9.30 AM.

CORE MEMBERS: Allyson Black
Baillie Joan Paterson
Depute Provost John Patrick

MEMBERS

ATTENDING: David Alexander
Jim Blackwood
Steven Carleschi
Colin Chalmers
Dennis Goldie
Linda Gow
Brian McCabe
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
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Nigel Fletcher, Joint Acting Director of Education
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Gary Greenhorn, Joint Acting Director of Education
Susan Mathers, Depute Chief Finance Officer
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Mark Meechan, Community Learning and Development Manager
Philip Morgan Klein, Service Manager, Social Work Services
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive
Brian Smail, Chief Finance Officer
Antonia Sobieraj, Committee Services Officer

PP5. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 28 November 2013 was approved.

PP6. PERFORMANCE INFORMATION 2012/13 AND 2013/14 TO DATE

At its meeting on 28 November 2013, 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 and had agreed to continue consideration of the performance statements for Education and Social Work Services to this meeting. The Convener advised that the continued items would be considered along with the Scrutiny Reports for each service which appeared later on the agenda.

PP7. EDUCATION SERVICES SCRUTINY REPORT

The panel considered a report by the Joint Acting Directors of Education setting out performance for the service for the period April to December 2013.

Gary Greenhorn, Nigel Fletcher and Mark Meechan gave an overview of the report.

Members, whilst welcoming the comprehensive information presented, questioned the need for the high number of indicators to be reported to the panel. In response, Mr Fletcher indicated that Education was the most closely monitored local authority Service and performance was reported both at a national and local level. In recognition of the need to closely monitor and access the information presented to the panel, Members thereafter requested a review of the number of agenda items and panel meetings as the full scrutiny and analysis of the information presented was essential.

Members raised concern at what they considered to be a cumbersome public complaints procedure currently operating within the Service. In response, Mr Fletcher indicated that the Service was currently reviewing the procedure and was producing a complaints protocol in accordance with national guidance. Complaints were, in the first instance, investigated at a school level and only as a last resort did Education centrally become involved. Members then stressed the value of the work undertaken by Community Learning and Development (CLD) and requested that future reports separate the CLD work from that of Education as a whole. This would acknowledge the importance of the CLD work, particularly in the light of the Welfare Reform agenda and the implications for vulnerable people within the local community.

Concern was expressed on the instances of violence by pupils on staff and the significant increase in incidents reported from the 2007/8 baseline. Further information was sought on the types of reported cases and the investigation measures undertaken by the Service.

The Chief Executive, in general clarification, indicated that the increase in instances recorded was partly due to an increase in reporting levels. Mr Greenhorn and Mr Fletcher explained that instances reported ranged from verbal attacks to physical violence, although the physical attacks were few in number. The majority of reported instances were investigated at the school level and appropriate sanctions were put in place. Mr Fletcher undertook to provide members with a breakdown of the various types of cases reported.

Questions were asked in connection with the current teacher numbers within schools, how vacancies were filled and the process for retaining probationers. In response, Mr Greenhorn advised that primary teacher numbers were growing in line with demographic trends and that those within secondary schools had remained static. There was a national shortfall in certain secondary teacher subject disciplines and a shortage of supply teachers. The Service was currently looking at ways to attract teachers to the area. The standard of probationers was high and there was a good success rate in retaining them within Falkirk schools. The issue of headteacher recruitment was discussed. Some concern was expressed that there were difficulties in attracting a sufficient number of candidates to be headteachers. Mr Fletcher acknowledged that there were difficulties in attracting candidates for some schools. This reflected national trends. It was suggested that some difficulty may arise where headteachers are seconded to Education Services HQ. Mr Fletcher advised that there were no such secondments to HQ. There were moves between schools particularly in the primary sector. This created valuable development opportunities for staff.

Members sought clarification on the effect staffing reductions in the centre had on the service provision. In response, Mr Greenhorn intimated that the Service aimed to prevent a reduction in frontline services as far as possible. To this end, and to increase efficiency, the Service was currently involved in a business transformation process. Its purpose was to 'join up' services by increasing opportunities and interaction between different sections of the service or with other Services where possible thereby creating a 'one door' service. A recent project linked up Finance benefits payments with Education school clothing grants.

An explanation was sought on the measures in place to address the disparity between the Council charges and those of the Falkirk Community Trust, the high charging levels generally and the need for a single point of contact for the hire of open spaces and halls. Mr Greenhorn indicated that the Service was currently looking at a 'one door' letting arrangement for schools and all community halls. This would harmonise charges and provide increased efficiency. A pilot would commence within the following two weeks with a report being submitted to members in the near future. Members' questions then related to the proposals for the future use of the Victoria Buildings in Falkirk, formerly used by Library Services, Community Learning and Development (CLD) and Falkirk Community Trust. In response, the Chief Executive advised that a report on options for the use of Victoria Buildings would be submitted to members for consideration in due course.

Members raised the importance of attainment for Looked after Children. Information was sought on the difference between the average tariff scores for Looked after Children and the school population as a whole as well as the comparison between the young people who were looked after away from home and those looked after at home. Reference was made to the higher level of attainment in the Council's Residential Units. Ms Anderson confirmed that high attainment within the Units had been achieved through sustained effort and stability within the Unit. There was recognition that young people under supervision at home often faced significant adversities and would often have a home life which was less stable than those in a sustained residential or foster placement. Education and Social Work Services worked in collaboration to provide as much support as possible for this group.

Members highlighted the importance of joint and partnership working between Services and other agencies including appropriate information sharing to ensure interventions necessary for the child's education and wellbeing. In response, Mr Fletcher confirmed the value of working on a multi agency basis and intimated that the Service was building on the good practice in this area. Ms Anderson referred to the information sharing agreements now in place between Social Work and Education Service's. These agreements facilitated joint working in instances where more intensive support was required. The speed of the intervention depended on the nature of the case. In child protection cases, the intervention was immediate.

The panel noted the service's performance.

PP8. SOCIAL WORK SERVICES SCRUTINY REPORT

The panel considered a report by the Director of Social Work Services setting out the performance for the service from April to September 2013.

Margaret Anderson gave an overview of the report.

Clarification was sought on the progress of the Health and Social Care integration and the utilisation of the Change Fund. In response, Ms Anderson confirmed that a full option appraisal on Health and Social Care integration and compliance arrangements was currently underway and a report, including proposals for the utilisation of the national integration (Change) Fund, would be submitted to members for consideration. The Bill had very recently been subject to significant amendments and the implications of these needed to be considered.

Members sought clarification on the arrangements for the implementation of Self Directed Support (SDS) Bill including the engagement with the voluntary and external sectors. In response, Ms Anderson confirmed the establishment of a project board including representatives from Finance and other appropriate Council Services to progress the implementation work. The engagement activities included consultation events with service users and Home Care providers. Ms Anderson then undertook to provide members with an update on developments underway on SDS in the Information Bulletin.

Members raised concern in relation to Occupational Therapist (OT) Assessments and the decline in performance in relation to the number of pending assessments. Ms Anderson confirmed that all posts were currently filled and the earlier backlog of assessments had been completed. There continued to be a significant and increasing pressure on Social Work Services generally. It was therefore necessary that all work was prioritised. In terms of OT Assessments, the priority one cases were being responded to.

The issue of delay between OT home adaptation assessments and the completion of adaptation work within homes was also raised. Ms Anderson clarified the process undertaken following the initial assessment.

In response to questions about the safety of older people with dementia living at home, Ms Anderson referred to the wide ranging post diagnostic support provided to sufferers and their families in line with the national dementia strategy. This included working with Alzheimer's Scotland and information sharing with NHS Forth Valley and other appropriate agencies to ensure the right package of support and monitoring. Ms Anderson undertook to seek clarification on the current practice for removing domestic

equipment, for example, microwaves should a safety issue be identified. Members requested figures for the total number of Council and Private Care Homes within the Council area and the current vacancies. Further clarification was additionally sought on the new Government guidance for patients' choice in relation to care homes. Ms Anderson agreed to provide members with information on the number of care homes and advised that the recent guidance at the end of 2013 required families to choose a total of three care homes with one of these having a current vacancy. This new guidance was a significant departure from the previous policy. Members also noted that private care homes had the discretion on whether to accept an individual and may make that choice based on whether the individual was self funding or not.

The panel noted the service's performance.

PP9. CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE SCRUTINY REPORT

(1) Finance

Bryan Smail and Susan Mathers gave an overview of the report.

In relation to the members' inquiries on behalf of local residents, members requested that should a local Member be involved in a query through Finance, that its resolution be advised to the local member as a matter of course. Mr Smail agreed that this would be reasonable.

In relation to customer service and the objective, **percentage of incoming calls answered promptly**, members questioned the value of this measure and suggested an alternative measure on the number of unanswered calls. Ms Mathers agreed that there could be some advantage in measuring the number of unanswered calls instead and this would be considered.

Members then sought clarification on the ethical investments within the Pension Fund and sought reassurance that effective monitoring was taking place. The Convener confirmed that regular monitoring arrangements were undertaken by the Pensions Committee with Fund Managers.

In relation to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP), the issue of the amount of the budget which remained unspent and the decision to take Disability Living Allowance (DLA) into account when assessing eligibility for a payment. Ms Mathers explained the rationale for taking DLA into account and advised that this was consistent with DWP guidance. In relation to uptake, she advised that targeted efforts were underway to maximise uptake. It was anticipated that expenditure would be close to budget by the close of the financial year.

The panel noted the Finance Division's performance.

(2) Governance

Rose Mary Glackin gave an overview of the report.

Clarification was requested on the cost and security implications of document scanning for the Council. Ms Glackin, in response, indicated that the Council's document scanning was undertaken in accordance with the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 and security was paramount in line with the Act's provisions. The filing of traditional paper files was becoming unsustainable and the scanning process was proving to be cost efficient and was being implemented for all Council Services with full access and document retrieval.

Information was sought on whether elected members could participate in the Customer First System. Ms Glackin indicated that the system had been designed with elected members being to the fore of the process. The Business and Members Services Manager would, in due course, provide an update for members on the programme for members' access and training. In response to further questions on the upgrading of IT equipment for members, Ms Campbell provided an update on the timeframe involved for the tendering and purchase of upgraded in-house equipment and securely encrypted mobile devices.

A request was made for details of the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received within the Council including the number of refusals. The Chief Governance Officer undertook to provide this information.

Clarification on the basis for different timescale performance measures between offers to lease commercial premises and to buy back former Council houses was sought. Ms Glackin advised that the offers were different in nature with significantly different amounts of work required before the offer could be issued.

Members sought clarification on the role of the printworks, the client base and the business generated. Ms Glackin indicated that the Council was the principal client of the printworks but external business was also sought. The printworks had proved to be cost effective and competitive.

The panel noted the Governance Division's performance.