

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 13 MAY 2014 at 2.00 PM.

COUNCILLORS: Baillie William Buchanan
Allyson Black
Provost Pat Reid
John McLuckie
Charles MacDonald

OFFICERS: Margaret Anderson, Director of Social Work Services
Shona Barton, Committee Services Officer
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Lesley McArthur, Corporate Policy Officer
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Linda Scott, Corporate Policy Officer

S8. APOLOGIES

None.

S9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Black declared a non-financial interest in items S11 and S12 as a Board Member of Grangemouth & Bo'ness CAB and considered that this required her to recuse herself from consideration of the item having regard to the objective text in the Code of Conduct.

Provost Reid declared a non-financial interest in item S13 as a former Director of Open Secret and as a supporter of Relationship Scotland - Couples Counselling Central Scotland and considered that this required him to recuse himself from consideration of the item having regard to the objective text in the Code of Conduct.

S10. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 April 2014 was approved.

S11. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND (FPP): ADVICE SERVICES

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services which provided an update on the work of the external organisations which receive funding who provide debt and money advice services, and who fall within the 'Following the Public Pound' (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements.

The report provided (a) an overview of the impacts resulting in demand as a result of welfare reform, (b) information on the strategic context behind the provision of advice services, (c) an overview of the funded organisations providing advice services, and (d) an assessment of each individual organisations performance.

An individual report was attached for the 5 organisations which received funding. Each report set out the service provided, the agreed outcomes/objectives and performance information.

Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report and highlighted the new reporting format, noting that it would be helpful if feedback could be provided on this new format.

In response to a question raised regarding the bedroom tax and the decision made by the UK Government to devolve responsibility for setting the limit on discretionary housing payment to the Scottish Government, Fiona Campbell advised that it was still not clear on the anticipated timescales for any change, but noted that there would be a report to the next Executive on the broader aspects of welfare reform which would provide further clarification.

The committee discussed the increase in the numbers of people who are facing sanctions from the DWP, noting that this included vulnerable people with mental health issues and women who have been the victim of domestic abuse. Fiona Campbell outlined some of the work that has been undertaken by Falkirk Council as part of the Fairer Scotland Fund to support those with low level mental health issues through the welfare changes. It was also highlighted that it was difficult to obtain accurate figures from DWP on the numbers of vulnerable persons who are affected by the welfare changes.

The committee then heard from officers in relation to the individual reports.

Forth Valley Macmillan Money Matters Project

Linda Scott provided an overview of the report, advising that the project had supported 926 people from the Falkirk area generating £963,340 in additional benefit income.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by the Forth Valley Macmillan Money Matters Project in meeting Council priorities.

Falkirk and District Credit Union

Linda Scott provided an overview of the report including a summary of the organisations key achievements.

Discussion took place on the areas which were covered by the Credit Union and the options which were being considered for further collection points across the Council area. Information was also provided on the funding which was received from the Council to fund the new IT system.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by the Falkirk and District Credit Union in meeting Council priorities.

Falkirk Armed Services Advice Project – Denny CAB

Lesley MacArthur provided an overview of the report.

Members acknowledged the good work being undertaken by the support officer.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by the Falkirk Armed Services Advice Project in meeting Council priorities.

In accordance with her declaration of interest, Councillor Black left the meeting at this point.

Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux

Lesley MacArthur provided an overview of the work of the 3 independent Citizens Advice Bureaux (Denny and Dunipace, Falkirk and Grangemouth and Bo'ness).

Discussion took place on the recording mechanisms used for the various figures contained in the report. Lesley advised that each Bureau dealt with specialised areas and this could account for the variation in figures. It was also noted that some of the figures shown for Denny and Dunipace represented the performance for a quarter and not for a full year as was shown with the other Bureau figures.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by the Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux in meeting Council priorities.

S12. CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX: SCRUTINY PANEL FOLLOW-UP

The Committee had considered a report at its meeting on 10 October 2013 which provided information on process, evidence and recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Panel on Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx). The recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel were then referred to the Executive in November 2013, where it was agreed that the recommendations be developed into actions. This report provided an update on the progress made against those recommendations.

Lesley MacArthur provided a detailed overview of the report.

Information was provided on the proposal that Falkirk CAB source new premises. Lesley advised that a property had been identified which was in Council ownership, however there were significant renovation costs associated with the property and officers were continuing to work with the CAB with regard to this project.

Discussion took place on how other service providers are or can be encouraged to work with the Citizens Advice Bureaux. Lesley MacArthur outlined the work that has been undertaken by the CABx which included roadshows in the One Stop Shops. Lesley Scott also provided information on the work of Falkirk Area Welfare Benefits Advice Support Unit (FAWBASU).

Decision

The committee:-

- (1) acknowledged the good progress made by the Citizens Advice Bureaux in working towards the recommendations arising from the scrutiny process, and**
- (2) agreed that subsequent progress reports be brought in line with the annual reporting schedule relating to Following the Public Pound.**

Councillor Black re-entered the meeting at conclusion of the previous item of business.

In accordance with his declaration of interest, Provost Reid left the meeting at this point. Baillie Paterson took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

S13. REVIEW OF EXTERNAL FUNDING TO SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY ABUSE

The committee considered a report by the Directors of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services and of Social Work Services which outlined the review of the services provided by four organisations for people who have been affected by abuse.

The report provided detail on the organisational overview, the objective and process of the review and the review findings for the service provided by each organisation. It also summarised the key review findings, the underpinning principles of service framework and the financial overview and the impact of the findings. As a result of the review there were a number of conclusions and recommendations made which related to the way the Council works with the organisations and also some which related directly to the organisations.

Fiona Campbell provided a comprehensive summary of the report.

In response to a question in relation to the proposal for a triage service to be set up, it was noted that the project would be led by Women's Aid working in conjunction with Social Work Services.

Discussion took place on the challenges being faced by the organisations, particularly in relation to financial constraints. The committee also discussed the valuable and necessary work undertaken by the organisations, the expectation that organisations which receive funding from the Council deliver services in the Council area and the importance of ensuring best value.

Decision

The committee agreed:-

- (1) to note the outcome of the review;**
- (2) that the Council should commission services as described within the specification and enter into Joint Working Agreements with the four organisations based on this specification;**
- (3) in order to achieve the savings agreed by Council, that during 2014/2015, Open Secret be provided notice of a reduction in funding of £34,000 during 2014/2015, with a further reduction in 2015/2016 of £26,000, equating to a total reoccurring saving of £60,000;**
- (4) that Council Officers enter discussion with Women's Aid to develop a triage service thereby establishing a framework for service provision under the new service specification and reducing the organisations reserves to an acceptable level, and**
- (5) that these recommendations be remitted to the Executive for approval.**