

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on MONDAY 1 DECEMBER 2014 at 9.30 AM.

COUNCILLORS:

Allyson Black
Charles MacDonald
John McLuckie
Baillie Joan Paterson
Provost Pat Reid (Convener)

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Nigel Fletcher, Joint Acting Director of Education
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
David MacKay, Pupil Support Service Manager
David McGhee, Head of Resources and Procurement
Kenny McNeil, Educational Resources Manager
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Anne Pearson, Curriculum Support Manager
Andrew Wilson, Policy and Community Planning Manager

ALSO ATTENDING:

David Flynn, Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland
Amy McGregor, Performance Support, Police Scotland
Mandy Paterson, Chief Inspector, Police Scotland

S43. APOLOGIES

No apologies were intimated.

S44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Black declared a non-financial interest in S52, as a director of Falkirk Towns LTD and considered that this required her to recuse herself from consideration of the item having regard to the objective test in the Code of Conduct.

S45. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2014 was approved.

Councillor McLuckie entered the meeting during consideration of the following item.

S46. POLICE SCOTLAND – FALKIRK AREA COMMAND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services presenting the local performance report by the local commander for the period April to September 2014. The report by the local commander provided additional information on road traffic collisions.

The committee asked how often Police Scotland would report to committee in 2015. Colin Moodie stated that at the meeting of Council on 8 October 2014 a six weekly timetable of meetings for the committee had been agreed. As there would be less meetings of the committee in the coming year both Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service would report twice annually.

Chief Superintendent Flynn gave a short presentation which provided a summary of his report.

The committee asked how detected crimes were defined. Chief Superintendent Flynn stated that a detected crime was one for which Police Scotland had detected the perpetrator and charged them. However, as the matter was then passed to the procurator fiscal not all cases would progress to court as a sufficiency of evidence was required to take action.

Members asked about the challenge of gathering evidence in cases of domestic abuse. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that there were a number of issues in this regard. In some cases after making an initial report the victim may be unwilling to proceed to prosecution and that due to the nature of domestic abuse incidents there were often no supporting witnesses. However, investigations would look at other sources of evidence such as background noise on the phone call to the police, injuries sustained and the statements of neighbours. Chief Superintendent Flynn advised that if the police had to release an accused person due to lack of evidence then a safety plan was put in place for the victim.

The committee asked how reorganisation had impacted on local resources. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that following reorganisation a number of specialist services were now more available to local operations including: Police Scotland Mounted Branch; the Operational Support Unit, and other support services. Central Scotland Police was resourced by 868 officers prior to reorganisation. Chief Superintendent Flynn stated that following reorganisation there were 625 officers in Forth Valley Division and that these officers were supplemented by officers from the East Regional Resource Unit and centralised resources. For special events local officers could be called to support colleagues in other areas, for example to police international football matches and this arrangement was reciprocal. Further, it was stated that the number of officers would not decrease but that reorganisation had created flexibility to police where demand arose. Although there had been changes to the structure of the police force, the number of frontline officers was the same as before reorganisation.

Members asked for information on community policing and retaining local knowledge. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that an Inspector had been specifically selected to work in Grangemouth because of their background local knowledge. Community Investigation Units had provided increased local ownership and utilised local knowledge.

The committee asked about the use of 'Stranger Danger' talks in schools. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that historically reporting increased following the delivery of these talks in schools and that the police investigated all reports fully. She further stated that in cases where information was being shared through social media that it was important people pass information on to the police.

Members asked about work done with young people on domestic abuse. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that school based officers were involved in education work to increase the awareness young people had of the issue and promoted positive relationships. Officers also worked with abusers, as in many cases these young people were reflecting behaviours witnessed at home. Chief Superintendent Flynn stated that Police Scotland were one of a number of partners involved in this work and that schools, social work and the voluntary sector all had an important role to play.

The committee asked what had caused the reduction in shop lifting. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that the Community Investigation Unit had been key to the reduction as they had carried out dedicated work to target shop lifters. They had worked to break individuals' offending cycles. Early intervention with high risk repeat offenders was found to be effective.

Members asked how complaints made about the police were responded to. Chief Superintendent Flynn advised that all complaints were responded to in writing. Although only a small number of complaints were upheld, the police viewed all complaints as an opportunity to learn lessons and reflect on how people felt they were treated. Each complainant received a full written explanation and a written apology would be issued where appropriate. In cases where complaints were upheld disciplinary action could be taken.

The committee asked which groups most often made complaints about the police. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that complaints were received from a mixture of groups with many coming from individuals who had been charged or from people complaining on their behalf.

Members asked for further information on the work with young people to prevent low level disruption. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that every crime file for a person under 18 years old was reviewed by the public protection unit. They then decided whether to refer to the Reporter or intervene with diversionary actions. Chief Superintendent Flynn stated that early and effective intervention was important and was delivered through partnership. Young people at risk of offending were referred to SACRO.

The committee asked for further information on the level of repeat offending by registered sex offenders. Chief Superintendent Flynn stated that he would provide members with this information after the meeting.

Members asked for further information on circumstances which led to adult at risk referrals. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that referrals were made in a variety of instances concerning individuals identified as adults at risk. These could include being the victim of crime, domestic abuse or bogus workmen.

The committee asked what role the night time economy played in the number of petty assaults. Chief Inspector Paterson stated that analytical work was carried out regularly in this area and that around half of all violence took place in private accommodation. Where a number of violent crimes occurred near licensed premises license checks were carried out. The police had responded to concerns about the town centre, charging 70

people for drug use and issuing 40 fixed penalty notices for minor anti-social behaviour incidents. She also referred to the success of using the mounted police; that staffing would be doubled for the festive period, and that 3 extra crews would be on duty after midnight on Saturdays.

Members asked for information about the change to the drink drive limit in Scotland on 5 December 2014. Chief Superintendent Flynn stated that many people who had been breathalysed recently would produce a fail after the implementation of the lowered limit at their current level. He stated that Police Scotland would maintain its focus on the causation factors of car crashes.

Decision

The committee noted:-

- (1) the performance on the local policing plan, and**
- (2) the additional information provided on road traffic collisions.**

S47. AUDIT REPORT – PROCUREMENT IN COUNCILS

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services which provided a summary of the Audit Scotland 'Procurement in Councils' report.

The report outlined the key messages contained in the Audit Scotland report, highlighted references to the Council and summarised the Council's current position against each Audit Scotland recommendation. David McGhee provided an overview of the report.

The committee asked what benefit Scotland Excel brought to the Council. David McGhee highlighted Scotland Excel's knowledge of suppliers and the use of national contracts.

Members asked for information about the reporting of contracting savings achieved through contract awards. David McGhee stated that there was a weekly bulletin for contract approval which included local financial benefits.

The committee expressed concern that when Scottish Government funding for Scotland Excel expires in 2016 that the deficit would be passed on to Councils. David McGhee advised that Scotland Excel's future funding position was not clear. Any change to the funding position would be reported to members. Scotland Excel were having to actively look at their running costs. David McGhee advised that more information on the funding position was expected in the next 12 to 18 months.

Members asked about the Council's use of national contracts. David McGhee advised that the default position was to use national contracts but that each case was evaluated to ensure participation was appropriate. The 90% participation rate was higher than most other Councils.

The committee asked about environmental improvements. David McGhee stated that sustainability was a key focus and that the Council was only the second local authority to get a gold award for timber related products purchasing. A documented process was in place to evidence that raw materials were drawn from sustainable sources.

Decision

The committee:-

- (1) noted the report, and**
- (2) agreed to refer to the Executive the issue of procurement training.**

S48. ATTAINMENT OF LOOKED-AFTER AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

The committee considered a report by the Joint Acting Director of Education Services which provided information on the attainment of looked-after children, school leaver destinations for looked-after children and action within the authority.

Nigel Fletcher provided an overview of the report.

The committee asked why the attainment of looked-after children in Falkirk was less than the national average. Nigel Fletcher advised that it was difficult to identify local trends as the number of children involved was so small that a yo-yo effect could occur. Whereas the national statistics, being drawn from a larger sample, appeared more stable, he did not think local performance was lagging behind other Councils. Further, the statistics provided a snapshot of a cohort's attainment rather than tracking their progress through their educational journey. Nigel Fletcher stated that academic attainment may not be the most appropriate pathway for all children. The Council utilised vocational qualifications and schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh and John Muir awards to provide opportunities for looked-after children to succeed. There were broader outcomes such as leaver destination which could provide a better measure of the success of the Council taking on the role as corporate parent.

Members asked if the Council could learn from others best practice. David MacKay advised that he was involved in local and national groups which shared best practice. Officers from other Councils were due to visit the area to take learning from the practice in Falkirk. The service tried to build capacity within looked-after children to engage in lifelong learning. Looked-after children at home performed less well academically than those looked-after away from home but looked-after away from home could face reintegration issues when returning to the community.

The committee asked for a report at the end of the academic year on the progress of the 16+ School Transitions Group and nurture groups. David MacKay advised that there was an ex looked-after child on the scrutiny group and that they act as the representative of looked-after children on the group.

Decision

The committee continued consideration of whether the subject matter of the report is suitable for inclusion in the Council's scrutiny plan to the next meeting to allow consideration of all the reports requested on 14 August 2014.

S49. MANAGING TALENT AND PROMOTING LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

The committee considered a report by the Joint Acting Director of Education Services which provided an update on issues relating to the recruitment process, appointment of senior managers in schools and Education Services' strategy for ensuring that schools are led and managed effectively. Anne Pearson provided an overview of the report.

The committee asked about the level of interest in and number of applicants for school management posts. Anne Pearson stated that the issue of low numbers of suitable candidates for head teacher posts was a national one.

Members discussed issues of supply for school leadership posts and that teachers who accepted early retirement from the Council are unable to take up these vacancies. They noted that it would be for members make policy changes. Nigel Fletcher stated that the difficulty of supply was a national issue. The service was dedicated to ensuring that the best teachers were in front of classes in Falkirk and that this was a major driver in increased levels of attainment. The committee requested that information be provided on the impact of preventing former teachers who took early retirement from the Council providing supply. Nigel Fletcher advised that a report would be provided to a future meeting.

The committee discussed that Falkirk had been held up nationally for the use of assessment centres. Nigel Fletcher stated that the service wanted to ensure that any candidate selected for final interview was capable of filling the post successfully.

Decision

The committee continued consideration of whether the subject matter of the report is suitable for inclusion in the Council's scrutiny plan to the next meeting to allow consideration of all the reports requested on 14 August 2014.

S50. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND 2013/2014 MONITORING REPORT - COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The committee considered a report by the Joint Acting Director of Education Services which provided an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding which provide services in relation to community development, and which fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements. The report covered the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

The report provided information on the key aims of community development and an overview of the funded organisations which contributed to community development. An individual report was appended for each of the organisations which received funding. Each report set out the service provided, the agreed outcomes/objectives and performance information.

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

(a) Denny Community Support – CLD Project

Kenny McNeil provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £29,536 of Council funding. The project was assisted by 35 volunteers.

The committee discussed that future funding was a risk for all FPP organisations and that work to secure external funding should be encouraged.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Denny Community Support – CLD Project in meeting Council priorities.

(b) Dennyloanhead Community Project – CLD Project

Kenny McNeil provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £33,209 of Council funding. The annual footfall survey showed an increase in weekly users of the centre, from 730 last year to 777 this year.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Dennyloanhead Community Project – CLD Project in meeting Council priorities.

(c) Powerstation (Whitecross) – CLD Project

Kenny McNeil provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £45,120 of Council funding.

The committee asked what duration external funding had been secured for. Kenny McNeil advised that he would provide members with this information after the meeting.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Powerstation (Whitecross) – CLD Project in meeting Council priorities.

(d) Workers Education Association – CLD Project

Kenny McNeil provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £57,635 of Council funding.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by the Workers Education Association – CLD Project in meeting Council priorities.

(e) CVS Falkirk & District

Andrew Wilson provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £133,148 of Council funding. He stated that areas of concern had been highlighted to the Chief Executive of CVS Falkirk & District.

The committee expressed concern that the organisation was not representing best value.

Decision

The committee requested that CVS Falkirk & District attend a future meeting of the committee to provide further information on specific aspects of the service provided.

S51. FORTH VALLEY FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services which provided an update on the initial pilot and subsequent procurement of Forth Valley Family Support Service by Forth Valley Alcohol and Drug Partnership.

The committee asked if addiction to gambling received enough attention in the local area. Fiona Campbell stated that she would provide members with information on the local situation after the meeting.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Forth Valley Alcohol and Drug Partnerships in meeting Council priorities.

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

S52. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND (FPP): COMMUNITY SAFETY

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services which provided an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding from the Community Safety budget, and which fall within the FPP reporting and monitoring arrangements. The report covered the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014.

The report provided information on the contribution to key outcomes, an overview of organisations which received funding and an assessment of individual organisations performance. An individual report was appended for each of the organisations which received funding. Each report set out the service provided, the agreed outcomes/objectives and performance information.

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

(a) SACRO – Restorative Acceptable Behaviour Service

Andrew Wilson provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £28,706 of Council funding.

The committee discussed that SACRO had successfully reduced their running costs following a previous request by members.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by SACRO – Restorative Acceptable Behaviour Service in meeting Council priorities.

(b) Specialized Security Taxi Marshalling Service

Andrew Wilson provided an overview of the report advising that the organisation received £28,706 of Council funding.

The committee asked about the low level of reserves. Andrew Wilson advised that this was because the organisation fully utilised the funding it received.

Members discussed that they felt the remit of the organisation was in line with policing priorities and suggested that Police Scotland could make a contribution.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Specialized Security Taxi Marshalling Service in meeting Council priorities.

S53. SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE – PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services which provided an update on the arrangements for the scrutiny panel on consultation and engagement and a review of guidance for future scrutiny panels.

Decision

The committee agreed

- (1) the scope and framework for the scrutiny panel on consultation and engagement, and**
- (2) noted the intended review of guidance for members on the scrutiny committee.**