

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: SCRUTINY PLAN - 2015
Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date: 8 JANUARY 2015
Author: CHIEF GOVERNANCE OFFICER

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 In terms of the Council's decision making structure the scrutiny committee is required to prepare an annual scrutiny plan for Council's approval.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to present a summary of the committee's consideration of reports requested at the meeting of 14 August 2014 as potential areas of scrutiny for the next plan.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 14 August 2014 the committee considered a report by the Chief Governance Officer highlighting a number of issues discussed at the Performance Panel since 28 November 2013, as potential topics for the next scrutiny plan.
- 2.2 The report highlighted areas where there had been: in-depth discussion, discussion on more than one occasion, or where the issue raised followed on from a recent policy development or initiative. The committee was invited to call for a report on any of these issues, or any other issue identified by the committee, which merited further discussion to determine suitability for inclusion in the scrutiny plan for 2015.
- 2.3 Following discussion the committee agreed to request more detailed reports on five areas, which were:
 - the effectiveness of the business gateway service following its transfer in-house;
 - the operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered lessons learned for the future;
 - the impact of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act and, in particular, the volume of requests to the Council and the cost arising therefrom in addition to the Council's effectiveness in dealing with requests;
 - the educational attainment of looked after children and other vulnerable groups, and
 - head teacher recruitment, the secondment of head teachers from schools and the use of acting positions in schools and Education Service management posts.
- 2.4 The committee considered reports at its meetings of 31 October and 1 December 2014, a summary of the discussion is presented below.

3. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

- 3.1 **The effectiveness of the business gateway service following its transfer in-house.** The committee heard from officers on the activity of business gateway following its transfer in-house. Members then asked questions regarding intervention work in redundancy situations and financial assistance provided to new businesses.
- 3.2 **The operation of the complaint system within the Council, in particular, the extent to which complaint outcomes are considered lessons learned for the future.** The committee heard from officers regarding the Council's complaints handling procedure and its implementation. Members then asked questions regarding the number of complaints compared to previous levels, the reporting of complaints information, national benchmarking and comparisons against other Councils.
- 3.3 **The impact of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act and, in particular, the volume of requests to the Council and the cost arising therefrom in addition to the Council's effectiveness in dealing with requests.** The committee heard from officers regarding the numbers of requests and the Council's compliance with timescales. Members then asked questions regarding which groups generated requests and what numbers of requests were attributable to each group.
- 3.4 **The educational attainment of looked after children and other vulnerable groups.** The committee heard from officers regarding the attainment of looked-after children, school leaver destinations for looked-after children and action within the authority. Members then asked questions regarding the discrepancy between looked-after children's attainment and that of non-looked after children, best practice in other Councils, and the use of non-academic awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh and John Muir award.
- 3.5 **Head teacher recruitment, the secondment of head teachers from schools and the use of acting positions in schools and Education Service management posts.** The committee heard from officers regarding the recruitment process, appointment of senior managers in schools and Education Services' strategy for ensuring that schools are led and managed effectively. Members then asked questions about the national picture in terms of the number of applicants for school leadership posts, the use of assessment centres and the effect of not allowing supply to be provided by former teachers who had taken voluntary severance.

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The committee has considered five areas for inclusion in the scrutiny plan for 2015 and is now invited to consider which of these (if any) it wishes to include in the plan.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the committee considers the content of the annual scrutiny plan for 2015.

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CHIEF GOVERNANCE OFFICER

Date: 12 December 2014
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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.