

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the PERFORMANCE PANEL held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2014 at 9.30 AM.

CORE MEMBERS: Rosie Murray
Baillie Joan Paterson
Depute Provost John Patrick (Convener)

MEMBERS

ATTENDING: Jim Blackwood
Tom Coleman
Gerry Goldie
Brian McCabe

OFFICERS: Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy Technology and Improvement
Alex Finlay, Business Development Manager
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Jennifer Litts, Head of Housing
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services

PP9. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 26 September 2014 was approved.

PP10. PERFORMANCE PANEL REPORTING SCHEDULE 2015

The panel considered a report by the Chief Governance Officer presenting a proposed timetable of meetings and reporting schedule for 2015. The report provided background on the reporting schedule for 2014 which had been reviewed, at the request of members, to have services report twice annually. The proposed schedule followed the revised format.

Decision

The panel agreed:

- (1) the timetable of meetings of the Panel for 2015; and**
- (2) the reporting schedule for 2015.**

Baillie Paterson and Councillor Murray left the meeting during consideration of the following item.

PP11. CORPORATE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY REPORT

The panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services setting out the performance for the service from April to September 2014. Stuart Ritchie gave an overview of the report.

The panel congratulated all staff involved with the implementation of the Council's new refuse collection service.

The panel asked how the Council compared nationally in regard to cleanliness. Stuart Ritchie stated that the Local Environmental Audit and Management System (LEAMS) was used as the standard measure of cleanliness across Local Authorities. Three inspections were carried out across the year and the results collated to provide the Council's LEAMS average. The three inspections comprised one self assessment, one Keep Scotland Beautiful inspection and one peer Council inspection. A score of 67 was recognised good practice through LEAMS and in the Falkirk Business Improvement District a score of 79 had been achieved. Stuart Ritchie stated that nationally there were a number of Councils grouped with a score in the region of 73 – 77.

Members asked if any surplus resources from the refuse collection service could be diverted to town centres to maintain and improve their cleanliness. Stuart Ritchie stated that street cleaning is carried out in line with the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which designates town centres as the highest priority zone. Street cleaning was being reviewed and the service were looking at the beats, frequency of cleaning and the type of cleaning carried out i.e. manual sweeping or with machinery. The review would even out resources and the findings reported to members.

The panel asked how the service would ensure that the completion date of external contractors work was being captured and recorded accurately. Stuart Ritchie stated that external contractors would include the completion of works date in the invoice, which would be verified against the services own inspection dates for the completion of works.

The panel asked if financial penalties had been considered for external contractors who completed work late. Stuart Ritchie stated that late completion was not a significant issue and that correcting the recording process would improve figures.

Members asked how much work was outstanding in order to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by the deadline of 2015 and if door entry systems were included. Stuart Ritchie advised that work was nearing completion in compliance with the deadline and that exemptions applied to some properties i.e. non-traditional or off the gas grid housing. In order to meet the SHQS capital programme funding had been used to make the required improvements. Stuart Ritchie stated that door entry systems were within the scope of the SHQS.

The panel asked for information on how the service contributed to the corporate goal 'Further developing a thriving, sustainable and vibrant economy'. Stuart Ritchie stated that the Council was committed to being an employer of choice and was developing its use of Modern Apprentices and Skillseekers.

Members sought further information on the new reporting tool which had been launched by the service. Stuart Ritchie stated that although it was a new concept in the course of one month hundreds of direct reports had been made in relation to a variety of issues including: roads faults; street cleaning requests, and housing repairs. The service was looking at smarter ways of working and the customer survey had revealed that customers increasingly contacted the service online.

The panel asked for an update on work undertaken in regard to mobile working. Stuart Ritchie advised that over the summer and autumn of 2014 proofs of concept trials had been carried out with some elected members, some chief officers and some building maintenance staff. These proofs of concept trials were aimed at user experience. As well as this, a technological assessment had been carried out to examine if a roll out of mobile working was possible. No data would be held on mobile devices and so if the hardware was lost data would remain secure. Mobile working would benefit staff and elected members allowing data capture at source to send on to central offices for action. Further, documents like reports could be accessed online which would reduce the Council's paper and print use. Stuart Ritchie stated that a report would be submitted to the Executive on the required funding and implementation timescales when available.

Members asked if the percentage of rent loss due to voids was outwith target across the Council area. Jennifer Litts stated that area demand was one factor which impacted the loss due to voids percentage. In areas with less demand the service was working to improve the situation. Different marketing strategies were being looked at and some larger properties were being considered for reconfiguration. Jennifer Litts stated that the Council performed well in its peer group for percentage of rent loss due to voids and that only a small amount of the total stock was void.

The panel asked for information on the Council's European Strategy and access to funding. Fiona Campbell stated that the strategy was being reviewed as it was a few years old and the service wanted to ensure the strategy was fit for purpose. The Council maintained a flexible approach in order to benefit from as much European funding as possible. She advised that a report would be submitted to the 2 December 2014 meeting of the Executive on the Leader European funding programme for 2014-2020.

Members asked for an update on the progress of the development of the strategy to encourage the social economy. Stuart Ritchie stated that the third sector was involved and that it had been picked up through the Community Planning Partnership. He expected that a strategy would be presented to members in the first quarter of 2015.

The panel asked how the Workforce Strategy review would be presented to members. Stuart Ritchie advised that a report had been submitted to the Executive on 11 November 2014 which presented an update on steps taken to add flexibility into the workforce. Further, some information had been presented to the special meeting of Council on 12 November 2014 as part of the Revenue Budget Framework 2015/16 – 2017/18 report.

Members asked about support for people who were hard to reach following the introduction of welfare reforms. Stuart Ritchie stated that the service had commissioned Jump Research to look at the situation regarding hard to reach people and that this would be included as part of a wider report on welfare reform to the Executive. Jump Research had looked at services provided from the customers perspective and highlighted the importance of a single point of contact. Stuart Ritchie stated that the Council's 13 Tenancy Sustainment Officers were suited to performing this role. Jump Research also highlighted that it was important to communicate with customers in plain English avoiding technical language where possible.

The panel asked for information on the review of depot provision. Stuart Ritchie advised that the review considered depots across the service and included depots owned by the Council and those which were leased. The review examined if there was a better way of providing depots and what their purpose was. Hubco were examining the space requirements of the service and options available.

Members asked how many visits to the Council's website were made from mobile devices and what impact this had on staff. Stuart Ritchie advised that roughly 180,000 visits per month were made from mobile devices. Regarding staff workloads he stated that faults reported online generated repair lines and that all services had to ensure the website was kept up to date and relevant.

The panel asked if the website had affected how complaints were made, when they were made and how many were made. Stuart Ritchie stated that very few complaints were made in person at one stop shops and that customers more often made complaints using the telephone or online. Increased use of online reporting had not led to an increase in the total number of complaints.

Members asked what work had been carried out to develop a rent policy to address income maximisation and welfare reform issues. Stuart Ritchie stated that the rent policy would be updated to reflect the impact of the welfare reform act but had been delayed while waiting on confirmation of what circumstances the policy would need to cover. The policy had been due in October 2014 but Stuart Ritchie expected that it would be completed in the first quarter of 2015. The Rent Arrears Improvement plan had been developed and submitted to the housing regulator. Work was also carried out by the Council's Tenancy Sustainment Officers. Jennifer Litts advised that the service worked with new tenants to reduce the likelihood of people entering arrears and that the number of tenants with less than 13 weeks of arrears had been reduced.

The panel asked about signposting other services to people who could benefit. Jennifer Litts stated that Tenancy Sustainment Officers were able to refer people on to other services, if the individuals agreed, and that this ensured the service did not lose contact with people. Positive feedback had been received from clients about this work and the use of a single point of contact.

Decision

The panel noted the performance statement.

Baillie Paterson and Councillor Murray rejoined the meeting during consideration of the following item.

Baillie Paterson and Councillor Goldie left the meeting during consideration of the following item.

PP12. DEVELOPMENT SERVICES SCRUTINY REPORT

The panel considered a report by the Director of Development Services setting out the performance for the service from April to September 2014. Rhona Geisler gave an overview of the report.

Members asked what strategies were in place to deal with unemployment, including those for youth unemployment and those for people who had been unemployed for more than a year. Rhona Geisler stated that the service had a number of strategies in place. Programmes were tailored to attract as much external funding as possible and a well established methodology was in place for doing so. Some of the specific projects undertaken by the service targeted the hard to reach unemployed, those who had been affected by the criminal justice system and the long term unemployed. The service worked with employers to encourage them to hire people who had been affected by long term unemployment.

The panel asked if planning had been in dialogue with Network Rail prior to the construction phase of bridge re-decking. Rhona Geisler advised that planning had not been part of the process but that the roads team were involved and were liaising to minimise the impact of the work on communities.

Members asked about the Business Gateway service and business activity in the area. Rhona Geisler stated that Falkirk had similar numbers of small and medium-sized enterprises to those nationally but also had a number of large employers in the area.

The panel asked why the portfolio management plan task had been rated as a tick when occupancy levels of the non-operational property portfolio were 92.5% against a target of 95% and above. Rhona Geisler advised that the figure was subject to fluctuations and that the 92.5% occupancy level was within target margins.

Members asked for information on rental income increases from 2009 to 2014. Rhona Geisler stated that she would provide members with this information after the meeting.

The panel asked for an update on the Denny Town Centre project having reached phase two. Rhona Geisler advised that offers were under consideration and that a report would be submitted to the Executive in due course.

The panel asked if the performance indicators for planning applications decision making timescale included major applications. Rhona Geisler advised that major applications were included within the appropriate category, householder and non householder.

Members asked if there was a resourcing issue in the trading standards team as the performance indicator for business advice requests for consumer protection completed within 14 days was off target. Rhona Geisler advised that the trading standards team had four staff within it and that underperformance was due to a recording issue. The recording system was being refined to better segregate categories of advice given, which would lead to an improvement in performance.

The panel asked what percentage of properties in Denny town centre were occupied. Rhona Geisler stated that she would provide members with this information after the meeting.

Members asked why the percentage of road network that should be considered for maintenance treatment was lower than the Scottish benchmark. Rhona Geisler explained that this was a good direction of travel and indicated that local performance was better than the national average.

The panel asked who had been consulted on the draft contaminated land strategy. Rhona Geisler advised that in the strategy the service looked to balance its regulatory duty with the promotion of appropriate developments. During consultation the service had engaged with a variety of key stakeholders.

Members asked who had been liaised with in creating the amended designs for Denny town centre CCTV provision. Rhona Geisler advised that the service had a role in the CCTV group as planners. Fiona Campbell stated that the Council liaised with Police Scotland and reviewed camera placement regularly to ensure they were located in the most effective places.

The panel asked for further information on the zero waste strategy. Rhona Geisler stated that the service had liaised with colleagues in Corporate and Neighbourhood Services to implement new litter receptacles which would allow for more effective segregation of waste.

Members asked about the reduction in energy consumption outcome and the cost of low wattage lamps. Rhona Geisler stated that the service monitor carbon emission levels and were looking at ways to reduce emission levels. She advised that the use of low wattage lamps would pay back over seven years and that LED bulbs were longer lasting than traditional bulbs.

The panel asked how the service monitored recycling contracts. Rhona Geisler stated that the normal contract monitoring arrangements applied and that inspectors were present on site.

The panel asked when public consultation would be carried out in regard to the proposed new Council headquarters. Rhona Geisler stated that work on the new Council headquarters was entering phase two and that the timing of public consultation was a matter for decision by members.

Members asked for information on house building targets for 2015. Rhona Geisler stated that she would provide members with this information after the meeting.

The panel asked for information on the impact to the local transport strategy following media announcements of changes to local bus provision. Rhona Geisler stated that the service was undertaking work to encourage the shift toward walking as a transport mode and that services could be reviewed where necessary.

Members asked for information on how many Freedom of Information requests were received by the service annually. Rhona Geisler advised that she would provide members with this information after the meeting.

The panel asked if there was a particular reason for the decreased staff turnover figure. Rhona Geisler stated that due to the wider job market situation external recruitment had significantly reduced which had a stabilising effect on service staff numbers.

Members asked how the target for percentage of complaints classified as “not upheld” of “partially upheld” was set. Rhona Geisler stated that this was a corporate target.

The panel asked for information on the work carried out by the service in regard to sickness absence. Rhona Geisler advised members of the success of the reporting and monitoring system which had been piloted in the Roads team. The service took care and time to monitor and deal with sickness absence effectively. Rhona Geisler stated that she held monthly one to one meetings with departments to address any issues and work towards improved levels.

Decision

The panel noted the performance statement.