

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (EXTERNAL) held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 18 JUNE 2015 at 9.30 a.m.

COUNCILLORS:

David Balfour
Steven Jackson
Charles MacDonald
Brian McCabe
John McLuckie
Rosie Murray
Depute Provost John Patrick

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology & Improvement
Matthew Davies, Service Manager
Alice Keenan, Corporate Policy Officer
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

ALSO ATTENDING:

Chief Superintendent John Hawkins, Police Scotland
Amy MacGregor, Inspector, Police Scotland
Mandy Patterson, Chief Inspector, Police Scotland

SE1. APPOINTMENT OF CONVENER

Colin Moodie welcomed members to the meeting. Council agreed on 13 May 2015 (ref FC10) that the Scrutiny Committee (External) would consist of eight members with four drawn from the Administration and four not drawn from the Administration (subject to the provision that no member of the Executive may be a member of the Scrutiny Committee (External)). The Convener of the Committee will be a member of the Committee from the largest Opposition group appointed by the Committee.

Colin Moodie sought nominations for the position of Convener. Councillor Balfour, seconded by Councillor McCabe, nominated Councillor Jackson.

There being no other nominations Councillor Jackson assumed the chair for the remainder of the business.

SE2. APOLOGIES

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Hughes.

SE3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

SE4. POLICE SCOTLAND – FALKIRK AREA COMMAND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services presenting the local police performance report by the Local Commander.

Local Commanders are required, in terms of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, to report performance of local policing as measured against the Local Policing Plan and to provide information about complaints against the police or in regard to policing.

Chief Superintendent Hawkins gave a presentation on the detail of the report which covered the period from 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 and highlighted the performance of policing in the Falkirk Council area in accordance with the local policing plan priorities:-

- Protecting People and Places;
- Dealing with Antisocial Behaviour;
- Violent Crime;
- Disrupting Organised Crime;
- Crimes of Dishonesty; and
- Making Roads Safer.

The Committee discussed the reduction in the number of speeding offences and road safety issues in general. Members asked for information on the local approach to raising awareness in regard to road safety including bike safety and school road safety campaigns. Members then highlighted concerns in regard to road safety around schools at drop off/pick up times and sought clarity of Police Scotland's role in this. Members specifically highlighted instances of irresponsible parking and asked for Police Scotland's position on policing parking offences.

The Committee commented on local community engagement, highlighting the increase in police attendance at community council meetings and the value in this. Members remarked on the increase in the percentage of positive stop and searches conducted. Chief Inspector Patterson confirmed that the number of searches had decreased and the percentage of positive searches had increased attributably making to a proactive and intelligence led approach. Chief Superintendent Hawkins confirmed the force's emphasis on community engagement and highlighted a targeted partnership approach to tackling social issues, citing examples in the Grangemouth, Bo'ness, Bainsford and Camelon areas.

The Committee highlighted concerns over the instances recently when Falkirk Police station has been closed to the public during office hours. Chief Inspector Patterson confirmed that, due to staff absence the office had been closed on a number of occasions. Following a review the office will be staffed and open during office hours only.

Chief Superintendent Hawkins explained the force's approach to tackling high impact/high victim crimes. In response to a question in regard to the drop of 9% in the detection rate of acquisitive crime, he pointed to an increase in the detection rate of residential housebreaking as an example where such an approach, which had been successful.

The Committee discussed the impact of excessive alcohol consumption on victim vulnerability and sought information on the force's approach to both supporting victims of crime. Chief Inspector Patterson explained that a range of interventions, with a range of partners, are available and where vulnerability is identified the public protection unit will look to identify the most appropriate intervention. Similarly in custody, where a large proportion of detainees have substance issues a range of interventions are available, citing, for example, an increase in referrals of detainees with addiction needs to the SIGNPOST support organisation.

In regard to the reporting of performance the Committee sought clarity on why performance information was measured against the previous year and against the preceding 5 year average. Chief Superintendent Hawkins stated that comparisons against both were of value, noting that overall crime in Scotland was at a 40 year low. The Committee then discussed instances where the Prosecutor Fiscal takes determines that there a no proceedings on drugs supply cases put forward by the police. Chief Inspector Patterson explained that fiscal policy had changed in regard to the evidence required to prosecute. As a consequence the number of cases which fall has risen.

Decision

The Committee noted the performance of Police Scotland against the priorities set out in the Local Policing Plan.

SE5. 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 who fall within the Following the Public Pound reporting and monitoring arrangements.

The report provided background on each organisation, highlighting their respective contribution to the Council's Single Outcome Agreement priority of Safer Communities.

An individual report was appended for each of the four organisations which receive funding. Each report set out the service provided, the agreed outcomes and objectives, and performance information for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 together with information on their funding and the Council's contribution thereto.

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

(a) Falkirk Towns Ltd - Specialized Security - Taxi Marshalling Service

Alice Keenan provided an overview of the report, advising that Specialized Security received £36,000 of Council funding in the period (with total funding of £52,000) and provides a taxi marshalling service in Newmarket Street and Meadow Street and also the Safe Base initiative over the festive period.

The Committee praised the taxi marshalling service and its contribution to reducing anti-social behaviour in the town centre. Members also highlighted the multiagency approach to tackling alcohol related antisocial behaviour and in particular the Street Pastor initiative. The Committee sought clarification on the funding available for the marshalling services

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Falkirk Towns Ltd – Specialized Security in delivering Council priorities.

(b) Sacro – Restorative Acceptable Behaviour Service

Alice Keenan provided an overview of the report, advising that Sacro received funding for two initiatives - £46,104 for the Restorative Acceptable Behaviour Service – Anti Social Behaviour and £81,296 for the Restorative Justice Service – Youth Service. The latter is reported on separately at (c) below.

The Restorative Acceptable Behaviour Service aims to divert young people from anti social behaviour and criminal activity, reduce the fear of crime and support and promote safer communities.

The Committee sought clarification on the services provided, in particular the referral mechanism and the client groups supported by the initiatives. Ms Keenan explained that referrals stem from a number of can originate as a result of anti social behaviour or offending and the majority of referrals are made by Council services. Members asked for further information on the partnership work with schools and the measures of intervention employed. Ms Keenan explained that there were specific initiatives set up in individual schools, for example an Alternative To Exclusion initiative at Falkirk High School and groupwork at St Mungo's high School and, while Sacro would liaise with each school, there was not a single one size fits all initiative for schools. Members then asked whether all headteachers were aware of the Service and its benefits. Ms Keenan, in reply, stated that the (former) Education Service was involved through the Community Safety Partnership and reiterated that Sacro would be willing to liaise with all schools.

Members then sought clarification on the funding available and questioned whether the service was meeting its agreed outcomes.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Sacro – Restorative Acceptable Behaviour Service in meeting Council priorities.

(c) Sacro – Restorative Justice Service

Matthew Davies provided an overview of the report, advising that Sacro received £81,296 for the service which aims to provide victims of crime and anti social behaviour the opportunity to apologise to their victims and repair the damage they have done.

The Committee sought further detail on the outcomes and in particular questioned whether the agreed objective of receiving 120 referrals had been achieved. Mr Davies explained the referral process, the majority of which are received through the Youth Justice Referral Group. In 2014/15 106 referrals had been received, lower than the target of 120, and this, he attributed to lower than anticipated referral numbers in the earlier part of the year due to a redesign of the referral processes and on Government funding pressures.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Sacro – Restorative Acceptable Justice Service in meeting Council priorities.

(d) Forth Valley Alcohol and Drug Partnerships – Contract to Scottish Families Against Drugs (SFAD) Forth Valley Family Support Service (FVFSS)

Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report, highlighting the role of the Family Support Service, which provides support across the Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling Council areas and which was established in March 2014 following a pilot project in 2012/13. Each of the Councils in the Forth Valley contributed £20,000 in 2014/15 for the service which received 83 referrals in the period.

The Committee asked whether the number of referrals (83 compared to 100 in 2013/14) represented an effective use of the Council's limited funding. Ms Campbell confirmed that the Forth Valley Drug and Alcohol Partnership reviews the service quarterly and in particular monitor the uptake of the services provided.

In regard to funding, Ms Campbell confirmed that funding was available from each of the local authorities for 2015/16. The service was, she confirmed, staffed by Volunteers.

The Committee then sought further information on the service provider and the partners with which the service engages. Ms Campbell explained that, while the service has links with the Council's Social Work Services, through the Drugs and Alcohol Partnership, its main links are with organisations such as SIGNPOST. In regard to its outcomes, Ms Campbell explained that one of its roles was to help support new groups to form and become self-sustaining. Members then asked how the work, which was to support families, compared to the services provided by Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Forth Valley Alcohol and Drug Partnerships – Contract to Scottish Families Against Drugs - Forth Valley Family Support Service.