

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (EXTERNAL) held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2015 at 9.30 a.m.

COUNCILLORS:

David Balfour
Gordon Hughes (Convener)
Charles MacDonald
Brian McCabe
John McLuckie
Rosie Murray

OFFICERS:

Sally Buchanan, Welfare Reform Project Manager
Elaine Costello, Integration Support Manager
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Andrew Wilson, Community Planning Manager
Eddie Ritchie, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Gary Laing, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
David Garrity, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

ALSO ATTENDING:

SE6. APPOINTMENT OF CONVENER

Colin Moodie welcomed members to the meeting. Having received an apology from the Convener, Councillor Jackson, nominations were sought for the position of Convener for the meeting. The committee was advised that in line with Standing Order 50.5 the Convener of the Scrutiny Committee (External) must be a member of the Committee from the largest Opposition group.

Councillor Balfour nominated Councillor Hughes. There being no other nominations Councillor Hughes assumed the chair for the remainder of the business.

SE7. APOLOGIES

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Jackson.

SE8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made at this point.

SE9. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 18 June 2015 was approved.

SE10. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND: EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – 2014/2015 MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding to provide services to children and young people and who fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements.

The report provided information on the strategic context of services to children and families including: rising population; increase in vulnerability; the national policy context, and the local policy context.

An individual report was appended for each of the seven organisations which received 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 amount contributed by the Council. Robert Naylor provided an overview of the report.

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

(a) Aberlour Child Care Trust – Aberlour Early Years Outreach

Elaine Costello provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £315,162 of Council funding and £3,000 of in-kind support in the period. This equated to 79% of the organisation's total funding. The organisation provided support to expectant parents and families with children under the age of four years. The committee were advised that in the period 302 families had been supported.

The committee asked if the risk rating of medium had been assigned due to anticipation of further reductions to the level of funding available. Elaine Costello stated that was the reason and that the organisation had been advised of this and worked with the Council to redesign its services in order to ensure that service delivery could be maintained in the future if there were reductions to funding.

Members discussed the work of Finding the Balance Groups and asked if there had been an increase in the amount of mental health support provided. Elaine Costello advised that detailed information could be provided to members after the committee and that in the previous year four groups had been run while there had been six in the current year. She advised that there were 8 participants per group.

The committee discussed the possibility of duplication were multiple services were engaged to deliver similar services and ensuring a consistency of offering across the

Council area. Elaine Costello stated that the other organisations being reported on did deliver some similar services while not being entirely congruent with one another. She advised that a piece of work would be undertaken by the service to identify how to improve consistency across the area. She also stated that a policy development panel on a review of inclusion was being undertaken and that part of its work would be to look at the contribution of early intervention services to children and young people.

Members discussed capacity building in externally funded organisations and if they had access to training needs analyses. Elaine Costello advised that collaboration between the organisations and the Council had been increased through the Falkirk Family Support Public Social Partnership which had included the services in the report and Education's Family Support Service and Social Work's Intensive Family Support Service. The external organisations had access to any training the Council offered and had also been able to access training available through one of the other external organisations.

The committee sought further information on cases where there had been deterioration despite the service working with a family. Elaine Costello advised that there were only a few cases of deterioration and that it was usually due to a shift in circumstances for that family such as a bereavement or a child protection issue. In such cases the services continued to work with the families to try and improve the situation.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Aberlour Child Care Trust – Aberlour Early Years Outreach in delivering Council priorities.

(b) Aberlour Child Care Trust – Family Centre Langlees

Elaine Costello provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £225,012 of Council funding and £3,000 of in-kind support in the period. This equated to 98% of the organisation's total funding. The organisation provided support to expectant parents and families with children up to the age of twelve years. The committee were advised that in the period 147 children and their families had been supported. Following receipt of support 38 families were signposted to other services.

The committee asked for further information on the partnership working between the organisation and Community Learning and Development (CLD). Elaine Costello advised that there was a strong working connection between the two groups. The organisation had attracted extra funding to provide families with access to food over the summer period and this had been delivered in partnership with CLD who had signposted families to the organisation through playgroups and summer clubs. CLD had also worked with the organisation when holding events in Langlees in order to attract a wider spread of the community.

Members discussed the role of the monitoring officer and sought further information on the role. Elaine Costello stated that all external organisations in receipt of Council funding which fall within the FPP monitoring arrangements are assigned a monitoring officer. Monitoring officers met with the organisation at least once every three months and in many cases more frequently. If outcomes were not being met then the monitoring officer needed to work with the organisation to assist in delivering those outcomes.

The committee then asked for further information on risks regarding external organisations such as poor governance. Elaine Costello stated that there could be risks relating to governance but also risks arising from the impact of staff changes on small organisations or not getting the required financial information.

Members highlighted the differences in service delivery and cost between the two services provided by Aberlour Child Care Trust and that there was not a consistency of offering across the Council area. Robert Naylor advised that he intended to discuss such variances with all funded external organisations. Services had previously been commissioned where a need had been identified but the aim was to deliver a consistent approach across the Council area. He stated that the work of the policy development panel on inclusion would contribute toward this aim. He also advised that to ensure an avoidance of duplication of services it was intended that there would be a full integration of the Education Family Support Service and Social Work Intensive Family Support Service.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Aberlour Child Care Trust – Family Centre Langlees in meeting Council priorities.

(c) Barnado's – Barnado's Education and Family Support Service

Elaine Costello provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £314,605 of Council funding and £16,200 of in-kind support in the period. This equated to 92% of the organisation's total funding. The organisation provided support to children and young people from birth to 18 years and their parents/carers through a planned stage of early intervention in order to maintain the child's place in mainstream education. In the period 97 children were directly supported.

The committee sought further information on emotional literacy. Elaine Costello stated that the work on emotional literacy helped to develop a child's ability to express and talk about their feelings. The work also improved the attachment of children to their parents.

Members discussed monitoring carried out internally by the organisation and asked if matched the indicators used by the Council. Elaine Costello advised that the systems worked well together and that Barnado's monitored wellbeing outcomes, as did Aberlour. However, their scales for measuring improvement used opposite directions of travel but it was the distance travelled on the scales which was important and comparable.

The committee asked about the level of demand for the service as the number of requests for assistance had decreased. Elaine Costello advised that there had been a dip in referrals but that the issue had been investigated and mitigated against. There was currently a waiting list to utilise the service as referrals had increased.

Members asked for further information on the referral process. Elaine Costello stated that a co-operative approach had been implemented involving senior family support workers meeting with the managers of the funded organisations and determining who was best placed to deal with the request for support which was then allocated. Members were advised that there was a written protocol in place and that this would be shared with them after the meeting.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Barnado's – Barnado's Education and Family Support Service in meeting Council priorities.

(d) Barnado's – New Beginnings

David Mackay 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 discussed that the organisation was meeting the targets of improvements and compared well to other organisations. Members also discussed the inclusion of a case study and commented on how valuable this had been.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Barnado's – New Beginnings in meeting Council priorities.

(e) Home-Start – Home-Start Falkirk West

Elaine Costello provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £29,488 of Council funding and £6,000 of in-kind support in the period. This equated to 34% of the organisation's total funding due to the award of funding from the Big Lottery. The organisation provided a home visiting support service through trained volunteers to vulnerable families with young children. In the period 88 families were supported by volunteers.

The committee asked about the capacity of the organisation as the agreed outcome was to support 30 families but support had been given to 88 in the period. Elaine Costello stated that the funding awarded from the Big Lottery had enabled more groups to be run. In relation to a question on paid staffing, Elaine Costello advised that there was one core employee and one temporary member of staff employed through the Big Lottery funding.

Members asked about the process of setting agreed outcomes and who had responsibility for this. Elaine Costello stated that the outcomes were being reviewed in light of the increased funding. She advised that as the organisation provided support through volunteers there were challenges in quantifying the level of service which could be provided as people gave different amounts of time. She further stated that a ratio of support as close to one to one as possible was best.

The committee commented on the quality of support provided by the service and asked why the project was not rolled out further across the Council area. Elaine Costello advised that the issue was being looked at carefully to try and ascertain how much work could be done by volunteers.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Home-Start – Home-Start Falkirk West in meeting Council priorities.

(f) National Health Service Forth Valley – Speech and Language Therapy

Andrew Facherty provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £515,040 of Council funding. The organisation provided language based additional support to children in Falkirk.

The committee asked how many therapists were involved in the project and were funded by the Council. Elaine Costello advised that there were 12 full time equivalent therapists. Approximately 8 posts were funded by the Council and 4 by the NHS.

Members discussed the public perception of the referral process and the length of wait for children to get to see a therapist. Andrew Facherty stated that 100% of referrals were assessed within 18 weeks. The committee then discussed the referral process and Andrew Facherty stated that the service worked in co-operation with parents whenever possible. He advised that the project enabled small amounts of therapy to be provided to large numbers of children rather than offering intensive support to a small number of children. In response to a point on the decreased number of children supported, Andrew Facherty advised that either the number of therapists would need to be increased or there would need to be a greater focus on group work to increase the number of children supported.

The committee asked who made referrals for children to the service. Andrew Facherty advised that a number of referrals came from GPs and that the service was provided to children and young people from 2 to 19 years old but that early intervention was important. Elaine Costello stated that teachers, early years officers and health visitors were also sources of referrals.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by National Health Service Forth Valley – Speech and Language Therapy in meeting Council priorities.

Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor McLuckie declared a non-financial interest by virtue of his familiarity with the service, and considered that he required to recuse himself from consideration of the item, having regard to the objective test in the Code of Conduct. Councillor McLuckie thereafter left the meeting.

(g) One Parent Families Scotland – Braes Children and Families Centre

Elaine Costello provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £136,064 of Council funding and £6,000 of in-kind support in the period. The organisation provided a range of support to parents (especially lone parents) on a variety of issues via family support, advice on benefits, income maximisation, debt, parenting, befriending, supported childcare sessions and 600 hour placements for 2 year olds. In the period 105 parents were directly supported.

The committee asked about the impact of reductions in funding to the service. Elaine Costello advised that the service had restructured its provision and was providing supported childcare as families could access the Scottish Government's 600 hours of childcare for 2 year olds.

Members asked about the management and governance of the organisation. Elaine Costello advised that she had meetings with the national finance manager and that the organisations accounts were up to date as were its governance procedures. Further, she held regular meetings with the local manager who had adapted the service quickly when advised of the reduction in funding.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by One Parent Families Scotland – Braes Children and Families Centre in meeting Council priorities.

Councillor McLuckie re-entered the meeting following consideration of the previous item.

SE11. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND: UPDATE

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing Falkirk & District Credit Union's accounts and the percentage of the Council's funding in the organisation's total funding which had been requested at the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee of 14 May 2015 (ref S9 (b)). Sally Buchanan provided an overview of the report.

Members asked about the possibility of a town centre branch location for the credit union. Sally Buchanan advised that a feasibility study had been carried out, funded by Lloyds Bank, but that a decision had been taken not to proceed with a town centre location at this time. A refurbishment of the current Grangemouth premises was the preferred option although the Credit Union remained keen on having a town centre presence but that there was a big risk associated with the move.

The committee sought further information on the increased number of fixed loan accounts. Sally Buchanan advised that the product was offered to provide a more suitable option for clients than being driven to payday loan companies.

Members discussed the organisation's reserves and changes to regulations. Sally Buchanan stated that previously the bad debt provision had been kept separately but that this had been revised and was now incorporated in the total reserves level.

The committee asked for further information on quick loans. Sally Buchanan advised that it had previously been the case that a person needed to be a member for a certain period of time before they could access loan facilities but that loans could be granted more quickly now if the person was employed and met all other conditions.

Members asked how the Council had supported the drive to increase the credit union's client base. Sally Buchanan made reference to a variety of promotional activity carried out, including: the provision of a development officer two days a week; promotion on the Council's September payslips; an e-mail to all Council staff, and a promotional event held at the Council's offices.

The committee sought information on the link between the credit union and schools. Sally Buchanan stated that there had been lots of work carried out with both primary and high schools. Further to the work already carried out, the organisation was considering having a stall at school parents' evenings.

The committee discussed the role of Community Learning and Development (CLD) in promotion of the credit union and building capacity in communities. Sally Buchanan advised that the development officer had spoken with CLD staff and that more work in the area could be looked at.

Members asked if the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) signposted people to the organisation. Sally Buchanan stated that the DWP were aware of the organisation and she hoped that they were signposting people to the credit union. Andrew Wilson stated that the DWP had recently become a member of the Community Planning Partnership Leadership Board and were on the sub group on poverty so there would be enhanced communication between the Council and DWP.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the organisation in meeting Council priorities.

SE12. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – FALKIRK & WEST LOTHIAN COMMAND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting reports by the Local Senior Officer on: Falkirk performance for 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015, and Falkirk performance for April 2015 to June 2015. Andrew Wilson provided an overview of the report and Gary Laing, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) provided an overview of the attached performance reports.

Following reference to lockable bin lids in the presentation from the Local Senior Officer the committee asked for further information on deliberate fire setting. Eddie Ritchie advised that in past cases where areas had a high incidence of deliberate fire setting to bins the SFRS had utilised lockable lids to deter fire starting. In regard to any issues of deliberate fire setting at fly tipping sites the service engaged with environmental services to find a solution such as reduction of tree coverage or education in schools.

The committee asked about the service providing support to the Scottish Ambulance Service in deployment of defibrillators. Gary Laing stated that as the number of fires had decreased while the percentage of elderly population which had increased the demand on the Scottish Ambulance Service. In cardiac arrest situations in Scotland it was projected that 1,000 lives a year could be saved through early arrival to incidents. West Lothian was one of three areas selected to trial the deployment of defibrillators by the SFRS.

Members asked about controlled fire situations. Gary Laing stated that where the SFRS were contacted by an adult that they were going to have a controlled fire that was generally accepted but that if another person was to call the fire in then an appliance would attend.

The committee asked for further information on the tasking and co-ordinating group. Andrew Wilson stated that it was a part of the Community Planning Partnership approach. Gary Laing advised that the meetings were held at Grangemouth Police station involving the police, housing, SFRS and community safety wardens. He advised that most Council areas had a similar group in place.

Decision

The committee noted the report.