

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 15 OCTOBER 2015 at 9.30 AM.

COUNCILLORS:

Allyson Black
Stephen Bird
Baillie William Buchanan
Steven Carleschi
Colin Chalmers
Cecil Meiklejohn (convener)
Baillie Joan Paterson
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS:

Caroline Binnie, Communications & Participation Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy & ICT Improvement
Deirdre Cilliers, Head of Social Work Adult Services
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Kathy McCarroll, Head of Social Work
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services

S19. APOLOGIES

No apologies were submitted.

S20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Chalmers declared a non-financial interest in item S23 as a relation of a service user and considered that this required him to recuse himself from consideration of the item.

S21. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 August 2015 was approved.

Provost Reid and Councillor Carleschi entered the meeting during consideration of the previous item of business.

S22. ORDER OF BUSINESS

In terms of Standing Order 25.1(iii), the committee agreed to vary the order of business from that detailed on the agenda for the meeting. The following items have been recorded in the order that they were taken at the meeting.

In accordance with his declaration, Councillors Chalmers left the meeting at this point.

S23. CLOSURE OF ROWANS SHORT BREAK SERVICE

The committee considered a report by the Head of Social Work Adult Services providing an update on the decision to close the Rowans short break service and purchase an equivalent number of places externally (ref FC69). The report provided background information which highlighted that an Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment had been undertaken. Information was also provided on communication and engagement work undertaken, alternative resources available, and the impact on service users and families. Deirdre Cilliers provided an overview of the report.

The committee asked how the required level of savings would be met if the Rowans Short Break Service was not closed. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the service would conduct a review of the available options and that services would be looked at in the round.

Members asked for an update on the engagement process undertaken. Deirdre Cilliers stated that, as highlighted in the report, there was a need for further engagement and that co-production was a possible way forward to develop the services which people need. She advised that she had met with parents of service users to discuss ideas for future services and that she was keen to get input from all parties as part of the comprehensive review.

The committee sought clarification on whether the Meadows was a comparable service. Deirdre Cilliers advised that the Meadows was local and that for some service users at the Rowans, their needs could be met at the Meadows. She highlighted that the key strength of the Meadows service was that it is local.

Further information was sought in relation to an event at the Sensory Centre on 4 November. Deirdre Cilliers stated that service providers in the area had been invited to promote the services they provide. This information would feed into the review and was part of the ongoing consultation process.

The committee discussed that most of the alternative resources highlighted in the report were not locally based. Deirdre Cilliers advised that one positive of the provision being further afield was to those who viewed respite as a 'holiday'. However, she recognised that for others more importance was placed on being near home and that this would be part of the review.

Members asked for an update on the acceptance of bookings for 2016, discussing that the public believed bookings were only being taken to December 2015. Deirdre Cilliers advised that bookings for 2016 were being taken but that she would look further into the matter and provide information after the meeting.

Decision

The committee agreed:-

- (1) to note the information provided in this update report regarding engagement with service users and carers;**
- (2) to note that the proposed closure of Rowans will not take place within the current financial year;**
- (3) to note that a full review will now be undertaken within the current financial year, and**
- (4) to request that a report on the process of and lessons learned from the Rowans budget decision is submitted to a future meeting.**

Councillor Chalmers rejoined the meeting following the conclusion of the previous item of business.

S24. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE REPORTING

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate & Housing Services Providing information following the evaluation of public performance reporting by Councils carried out by Audit Scotland. The report covered the background to the evaluation, information about Falkirk Council's assessment and set out improvement actions that would be taken by the Council. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report and Caroline Binnie then provided the committee with a short presentation.

The committee asked when the improvement plan would be available and stated that it was good to compare practice against other local authorities. Caroline Binnie stated that Audit Scotland rated each Council on each area, if it is identified that Falkirk needed to make improvements in a particular area the service would look at exemplar Councils to then draft an action plan.

Members asked about take up of information by age group and the use of Falkirk News. Caroline Binnie stated that the approach varies and that there had been positive feedback on the different methods used. It can be difficult to engage younger people in traditional forms of engagement. The Falkirk News was recognised as being a good method of providing information to the public. The service was using Twitter more actively to engage with young people and this had been found to be successful. There had recently concluded a scrutiny panel on consultation and engagement which had spent time focussing on the issue of engaging younger people.

The committee asked how the Council shares improvements through You Said, We Did. Caroline Binnie advised that the Citizens Panel was in the format of You Said, We Did and that the service could look at extending this. She also highlighted the use of plasma screens in various Council offices which displayed information to the public.

Members discussed the use of the Council's website. Caroline Binnie advised that the information presented on the home screen was varied to keep it relevant and up to

date. She highlighted that most external visitors to the website do not access it through the homepage.

The committee asked about the cost associated with utilising new methods such as Twitter. Caroline Binnie advised that there was a staff cost involved as people were needed to monitor and feed information into the account. This was met through existing resources. Teams were becoming more aligned to digital media.

In response to a question on what information was provided to the public on staff performance, Caroline Binnie advised that reports with indicators on sickness absence, turnover, training and satisfaction were provided.

The committee discussed what areas it was felt the public was most interested in. Caroline Binnie stated that a question was asked in the bi-annual customer survey about what the public is most interest in and how they want that information. She advised that Falkirk News rated highly and that the rating for the website was increasing.

Members asked what information on the website was the most popular. Caroline Binnie advised that school holiday information was very popular as was information on Home Spot. Further, there were areas which had spikes in demand seasonally such as information on road gritting during winter.

Decision

The committee noted the report.

S25. SOCIAL WORK CHILDREN & FAMILIES BUDGET POSITION

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services providing information on the budget overspend in social work children and families service during the financial year 2014/15. The report also provided contextual information and information on actions to monitor and manage expenditure. Kathy McCarroll provided an overview of the report.

The committee discussed the pressures associated with placements for looked after children away from home noting that Falkirk had a higher percentage away from home than at home. Kathy McCarroll stated that the service was investigating the trend in this area, particular in relation to the higher number of children looked after away from home. There was some evidence to show that the increase in the number of younger children becoming accommodated and the consequential increase in the number of permanence orders was linked to increases in drug and alcohol abuse. In relation to Children's Hearings decisions she advised that the service did not track the recommendation of the social worker compared to the final decision by Children's Hearings. However, this information would be available in the near future. Robert Naylor stated that the Reporter was being invited to visit the services available in the area to ensure that decisions were being taken in that light. Kathy McCarroll advised that since January there had been two cases considered by the Sherriff Court which had resulted in decisions for secure accommodation which the Council was liable to implement and fund.

Members asked about the progress of the former Focus School in Laurieston. Robert Naylor stated that it was hoped that more children who were currently looked after away from home would be able to return home as their education needs would be catered for in the area. There was also work ongoing to upskill staff at the Mariner Support Service to cater for those children and young people currently in residential care.

The committee sought information on how significant the increase of drug and alcohol abuse had been compared to previous years. Kathy McCarroll stated that the number of children on the Child Protection Register had increased over the last two years mainly as a result of the increase in substance abuse in this area.

Members discussed the rates paid to foster carers compared to those available in the private sector. Kathy McCarroll advised that fees were paid to foster carers and that in addition to this there was an age related payment per child. Some external agencies pay one flat rate and others do not provide information on the breakdown of their payments. The service continually tried to recruit new foster carers and she advised that the feedback received was that the fees and allowances paid were satisfactory. There was evidence that the Council was losing foster carers to external agencies. In response to a question on having had foster carers switch from external agencies to the Council, Kathy McCarroll stated that she was not aware of a significant movement in this direction and that the level of pay was likely a barrier to those already associated with external agencies.

The committee asked about the approach taken to sibling groups in care and if they were ever split up. Kathy McCarroll stated that the service tried to keep siblings together when first accommodated but that beyond this it was determined by individual need. Recent legislation limited foster carers to three children per household. Where adoption for siblings was considered a together or apart assessment was carried out. She advised that there had been an increase in the number of sibling groups who needed to be accommodated.

Members highlighted that priority needed to be given to collaborative early intervention work on drug and alcohol abuse. Fiona Campbell stated that the Drug and Alcohol Partnership had commissioned work to identify what the key issues are. The clinical advice was that rehabilitation facilities were not good for long term outcomes. The outcome of this work would be available to the Community Planning Partnership in December.

The committee asked for further information on the process of engaging external foster care agencies. Kathy McCarroll stated that there was a public social partnership approach to external agencies adopted in 2012. She advised that the Scottish Government had a national contract on foster care and residential school care which the service was looking at in considering whether to renew the local contract or not.

The committee requested a report once work had been progressed to address the overspend and that a further budget position update was provided.

Decision

The committee agreed to request an update report on the implementation of actions identified in the report, to provide updated information on the budget situation and categorisation of reasons for children becoming accommodated to a future meeting.

Provost Reid left the meeting during consideration of the previous item of business.

S26. SOCIAL WORK ADULT SERVICES OVERSPEND 2014/2015

The committee considered a report by the Head of Social Work Adult Services providing information on the budget overspend in social work adult services during the financial year 2014/15. The report also provided contextual information and information on actions to monitor and manage expenditure. Deirdre Cilliers provided an overview of the report.

Members sought further information on eligibility criteria. Deirdre Cilliers stated that it was a complex area. She advised that the first priority was to ensure that everyone was being fully assessed for services and given the right services for their needs. She also stated that a review of assessment on lower level needs needed to be carried out to ensure that assistance was provided to these people as quickly as possible. Through focus on reablement and better practice the service would be able to improve the budget position.

The committee highlighted that the service needed to make improved use of its resources, a question was asked if home carers could help with medication. Deirdre Cilliers advised that medication was a significant issue and that home carers do not administer medication in Falkirk but do in some other areas. However, she advised that the home carers in Falkirk do prompt people to take their medication. She stated that the training of staff was a priority for the service. Through the use of Integrated Care Funds a pharmacist had been employed for six months to scope the work that was required and to do simple assessments.

Members commented on the increasing demand for home adaptations and that in some cases a person's condition could deteriorate while waiting for the work to be carried out. Deirdre Cilliers stated that the service would look at how to do things differently and get small adaptations in place quickly. She advised that Integrated Care Funding was also being used to get a trainer for home carers so that they worked in a more reabling way. This was particularly important so that older people at home do not lose confidence in their ability to carry out tasks themselves. In response to a question on the availability of suitable housing, Deirdre Cilliers stated that there was good work carried out in collaboration with Housing. An occupational therapist was employed in Housing. She stated that there was sheltered housing available locally and that the service could improve in demonstrating to people the benefits of moving there.

The committee asked what the most significant area of overspend was. Deirdre Cilliers stated that there was a particular pressure on care packages for people with learning disabilities. However, frail elderly as a demographic were the most significant area of demand. The members then discussed the use of group homes in place of individual 24 hour placements.

The committee requested a further report on mitigating factors and service redesign.

Decision

The committee agreed to request an update report on the implementation of actions identified in the report including service redesign and mitigating factors.

S27. PERFORMANCE PANEL SCHEDULE

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing, as an appendix, a reporting schedule for the performance panel for 2016. Colin Moodie provided an overview of the report.

Decision

The committee agreed to the schedule of meetings for the Performance Panel as appended to the report.