

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER 2015 at 9.30 AM.

COUNCILLORS:

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

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy & ICT Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Frank Kennedy, Service Manager, Children's Services
Kathy McCarroll, Head of Social Work
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer

S28. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

S29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

S30. MINUTES

Decision

- (1) The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 October 2015 was approved and it was noted that there were outstanding reports in relation to:
 - i) Social Work Children & Families budget position update;
 - ii) Social Work Adult Services overspend update;
 - iii) Rowans budget process, and
 - iv) contract management;
- (2) The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 1 October 2015 was noted, and
- (3) The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 19 November 2015 was noted.

S31. SCRUTINY PANEL UPDATE – OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services providing an update on the work of the panel to date. Appended to the report were the panel's scoping document and four notes of meeting. Kathy McCarroll provided an overview of the report and highlighted that the next meeting of the panel would hear evidence from young people and their representatives.

Members agreed that it was important to hear the views of young people and asked why that meeting was to be held in early 2016 when it had initially been scheduled for late 2015. Kathy McCarroll advised that a meeting to specifically consider corporate parenting had been added to the schedule and therefore the original schedule had been revised.

The committee asked if, in its evidence gathering, the panel had identified addiction issues in families as a significant issue. Councillor Meiklejohn, the convener of the scrutiny panel, stated that addiction was emerging as a key issue and she noted that the Community Planning Partnership were working on the area as a priority. Members discussed the role of the Falkirk Alcohol and Drug Partnership and Fiona Campbell advised that the partnership was reviewing the balance of care to consider more community support. Further, the Community Planning Partnership's strategic plan was under review and would have more focus on substance misuse.

Members asked for further information on a Champions Board, which had been discussed at the corporate parenting meeting of the scrutiny panel. Fiona Campbell stated that the panel had considered what the best approach to corporate parenting for looked after children would be. They had been provided with examples of practice from across the United Kingdom, a number of authorities had already created Champions Boards. The examples showed that a variety of roles and remits were in place in different authorities for their Champions Boards. In some cases the Board was there only to promote a child's interests, while in other cases there would be direct contact with looked after children. The Council had submitted a funding bid in order to engage young people for their views on what they wanted from a Champions Board, it was felt to be important that the aspirations of the Council matched those of young people. Kathy McCarroll advised that the Service had received notification that the Council's funding bid had been successful.

The committee asked how other Champions Boards had measured success. Fiona Campbell stated that as Champions Boards were a relatively new approach most evidence was anecdotal on the different models and what their impact had been. Where authorities felt their model was not working well they had revised the approach taken.

Decision

The committee noted the progress made by the scrutiny panel – outcomes for looked after children to date and its programme of meetings for 2016.

S32. SCRUTINY PLAN UPDATE

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update on progress made against the Scrutiny Plan for 2015 and inviting the committee to consider the establishment of its next Scrutiny Panel. Colin Moodie provided an overview of the report.

Members discussed areas which potentially merited further scrutiny. Housing repairs and the maintenance programme was raised along with the approach taken to engaging tenants and owner/occupiers in the Scottish Housing Quality Standards programme. Members noted that a report on contract management, which had been requested previously, was scheduled to be presented to the next meeting of the committee. The committee also highlighted the devolved school management budget as an area for future consideration, focussing on how it is determined and what it is used for. Further, the committee highlighted the area of fees and charges requesting that a report focussed on non-statutory charges and a concessionary policy was submitted to a future meeting. Members commented that these reports should include information on what other councils do.

The committee also discussed how to increase the engagement of communities in service delivery and design. After consideration the committee noted that the convener would write to the Leader of the Council suggesting that a policy development panel be established on the topic.

Members discussed the establishment of a scrutiny panel on the operation of the Council's complaints system. They agreed that the panel would comprise five members with three drawn from the Opposition and two from the Administration and nominations provided to the Chief Governance Officer.

Decision

The committee agreed to:-

- (1) establish a Scrutiny Panel on 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 scope of the Scrutiny Panel will include customer feedback as well as formal complaints;**
- (2) request further information on the following areas in order to determine the topic to be included as the third item on the 2015/16 Scrutiny Plan:**
 - i) the devolved school management budget;**
 - ii) fees and charges, and**
 - iii) in relation to the outstanding contract management report that this include the engagement of tenants and owners in the housing repairs and maintenance programme.**

S33. AUDIT SCOTLAND: AUDITING BEST VALUE - A NEW APPROACH

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update on the thinking of the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland on the future of Best Value and Best Value Audits. A letter from Douglas Sinclair, Chair of the Accounts Commission, was appended to the report. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report.

Decision

The committee noted the report.