

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of special meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 9 March 2017 at 9.30 am.

COUNCILLORS:

Stephen Bird
Steven Carleschi
Cecil Meiklejohn (Convener)
Baillie Joan Coombes
Provost Pat Reid

OFFICERS:

Caroline Binnie, Communications & Participation Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology & Improvement
Matthew Davies, Service Manager
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services

S34. Apologies

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Baillie Buchanan and Councillor Chalmers.

S35. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest at this point.

S36. Scrutiny Panel Conclusions & Recommendations: Complaints Handling

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services setting out the findings and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel established to review complaints handling within the Council. Appended to the report were the findings of the panel, Falkirk Council's Annual Complaints Report 2015/16, and Service submissions considered by the panel. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report.

The committee discussed that there would be a statistical increase in the number of complaints received by the Council if the recommendation to change how requests for service were recorded, e.g. missed bins, was adopted by the Executive.

Members requested that it was made explicit that the Council considered complaints to be a key part of the performance and improvement framework and that learning from complaints was used to make a difference to practice.

The committee discussed instances of vexatious complainers and sought clarity on the Council's policy position. Fiona Campbell advised that the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) did not use the term vexatious but that the Council's policy reflected what was in the SPSO's policy on unacceptable levels of contact.

Following a discussion on elected members' lone working, particularly relating to home visits, the committee requested that information on the Council's lone working policy was included in the Member's Handbook which was being developed for issue after the local government elections in May.

Decision

The committee:-

- (1) noted the work and findings of the panel, and**
- (2) agreed to refer the panel's conclusions and recommendations to the Executive for approval on the basis that complaints should be seen as part of the wider performance and improvement framework.**

Baillie Coombes entered the meeting during consideration of the previous item. Councillor Carleschi entered the meeting during consideration of the following item.

S37. Joint Inspection of Services for Children

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an overview of the Joint Inspection of Services for Children. Information was provided on the process of inspection, its findings, recommendations and the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) improvement plan. The Joint Inspection of Services for Children and Young People Improvement Plan and the Care Inspectorate's Report were appended to the report. Robert Naylor and Matthew Davies provided an overview of the report.

At this point, Councillor Meiklejohn declared a non-financial interest in the current item of business as a board member of the Care Inspectorate. She stated that she did not consider that this required her to recuse herself from consideration of the item due to the historic nature of the report and that the committee could not alter or influence the Care Inspectorate's findings.

The committee discussed the role of the Community Planning Partnership and how partners were held to account regarding delivery of services. Robert Naylor stated that the Service had worked closely with community planning

partners in the development of the self-evaluation document. There was a desire to better identify children who were not in receipt of services but who would benefit from intervention. He advised that the inspection provided a snapshot of a particular point in time but that if the inspection had been carried out more recently he was confident most scores of adequate would have been goods.

The committee asked about the involvement of elected members in the inspection process. Matthew Davies advised that there had been a focus group with councillors and that some senior councillors had met with the inspectors during the first week.

Members discussed the number of reporting groups and asked if this could be streamlined. Robert Naylor advised that these groups had been looked at and that the structure currently in place was the streamlined version. Matthew Davies stated that the review of the structure had been undertaken in order to address the need for improved governance. The partnership was now clearer on who was responsible to who and when reporting was to be done. Robert Naylor stated that he would consider how to better advise elected members of the work going on at these groups such as the Children's Commission.

The committee asked about the action to monitor the prevalence of children on the Child Protection Register in excess of 12 months. Matthew Davies advised that the Service recorded information against 14 areas for concern which included neglect. There were quarterly reviews of children on the register as well as regular meetings of the Team Around the Child. If improvements for a child were not seen over a year long period the Service would review this to find out why and identify what actions or services could be put in place to change this.

Members sought an update on work regarding the Champion's Board. Matthew Davies stated that there were now staff in place to support the board and that they were currently planning the care leavers' event. There would then be progress made on the work to recruit young people to sit on the board. The Service viewed this as an exciting opportunity to improve the dialogue between young people and senior officers.

The committee asked about the reporting mechanisms in place for feedback on improvements and when this would be presented to councillors. Colin Moodie stated that there was a wider issue regarding the interface between the CPP and the Council and if there was a smarter way to get information reported back. He stated that he would look at the best way to do this in liaison with the Director of Children's Services.

Members asked about the role of young inspection volunteers and what feedback was reported from their conversations with local looked after young people. Matthew Davies stated that the inclusion of young inspection volunteers was a new feature of inspections. They met with local looked after young people in a focus group setting. The facilitator reported that the meeting was positive but that issues were raised regarding corporate

parenting, the family firm approach, employment, access to leisure, and public transport.

The committee sought further information on the results of the survey undertaken with Named Persons and Lead Professionals. Matthew Davies stated that some details on the results could be provided to members after the meeting. The main issue which had been raised was the ability of professionals to make a positive impact on young people's lives in the face of poverty. He advised that mitigating poverty was part of the Service's plan and that they were looking at the cost of the school day.

Members asked how staff had found the process of inspection. Robert Naylor stated that following the implementation of the action plan and the revised governance arrangements the broader service attitude was positive to take on the challenge and make improvements. Immediately after the publication of the inspection there had been a feeling of disappointment as the staff and Service felt they performed to a higher standard than the grades given showed. The Service had a good relationship with the lead inspector and he had been involved in the development of the action plan.

Decision

The committee noted the:-

- (1) publication of the Joint Inspection of Services for Children;**
- (2) recommendations for improvement arising from the inspection as outlined in section 4.5 of the report, and**
- (3) improvement actions contained in the Joint Inspection Improvement Plan.**