

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Performance Panel held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 23 March 2017 at 9.30 am.

Core Members: Stephen Bird
Cecil Meiklejohn (Convener)
Rosie Murray

Members Brian McCabe
Attending: Sandy Turner

Officers: Tony Bragg, Education Team Manager
Douglas Duff, Head of Economic Development &
Environmental Services
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Philip Morgan-Klein, Service Manager

PP25. Apologies

No apologies were intimated.

PP26. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

PP27. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 15 December 2016 was approved.

PP28. Rolling Action Log

Decision

The rolling action log was noted.

PP29. Children's Services Performance Update

The panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services setting out a summary of performance for the period September 2016 to February 2017. Philip Morgan-Klein and Tony Bragg provided an overview of the report.

The panel highlighted that the national average for performance in numeracy at SCQF Level 4 was 90% while local performance was 88%. Tony Bragg stated that there was some fluctuation between schools but that the significance of this variance was not currently known. There had been challenges in analysing the data provided through the Insight system. The Service thought it was possible that some of the return forms to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) had not been filled out correctly. There was a need to clarify which subjects contributed toward numeracy attainment e.g. science to allow more accurate recording at school level. He advised that the examination results for science and maths were good across Falkirk.

Members discussed the impact of the Reporter to the Children's Panel in making placement decisions for young people. They discussed that the Service had worked with the Reporter to ensure that the full provision of services available locally were known. There was a desire to increase the local education provision for looked after children to allow more young people to stay closer to home.

The panel asked how long the Service monitored the maintenance of positive destinations. Tony Bragg advised that the information collection was carried out by Skills Development Scotland and that any information held by the Service on maintenance of positive destinations came from their work.

Members asked about the review of the external fostering contract and anticipated cost benefits to sibling and long term placements. Philip Morgan-Klein stated that the external foster care costs had been reduced through negotiation to establish a new contract from April 2017 and that better rates had been achieved. The Service would also continue work to increase its own recruitment of foster carers.

The panel asked if the Service was looking at using private partner provision to assist with the implementation of 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare. Tony Bragg advised that there were currently 10 private partners used. Private providers were required to meet set standards in order to be commissioning partners with the Service. The standards used were those set out in Education Scotland's 'How Good is our Early Learning and Childcare'. In the past the Service had decommissioned providers who failed to maintain their standards. He highlighted that another option was the use of childminders to increase provision but that the Service was currently looking at what risks would be associated with this type of provision.

The panel discussed the inspection regime which childminders were subject to and the registration standards in place. Members asked how educational input from childminders could be assessed in order to ensure value for money. Tony Bragg stated that Curriculum for Excellence operated from age 0 – 18 so there would be expectations on early years educational outcomes. The focus would be on ensuring that developmental milestones were reached. The Service would engage with childminders to help develop good practice through sharing their expertise in effective play.

Members asked for further information on why the number of daytime respite weeks provided to children with a disability was significantly below target. Philip Morgan-Klein stated that the overall volume had declined. The trend was that parents had become less keen on overnight placements and had preferred to utilise daytime respite provision. The Service had developed more sessions through work on befriending. However, he highlighted that for those children with the most complex needs procuring the specialist placements they need could be challenging. He stated that the capacity of the Children with Disability Team had been increased through the recruitment of an additional member of staff. The short breaks bureau was looking at how to offer a more modern and innovative service. This could include the use of hotels where service users and carers could take short breaks. The Service had also implemented a voucher scheme for entitlement so that families were not locked into pre-arranged dates and could access provision more flexibly.

The panel sought an update in the level of kinship care placements. Philip Morgan-Klein stated that there had been an increase from 30 to 44 placements over a period of 18 months but that the trend was difficult to predict. Kinship placements were only appropriate in certain situations and depended on the individual circumstances.

Members asked how schools would be using their allocation of the Pupil Equity Funding. Tony Bragg stated that some schools were exploring the possibility of pooling their resources as a cluster for a joint initiative like an attendance officer. There was substantial evidence showing that attendance had a significant impact on attainment. However, he noted that use of the funding for additional staffing could not be guaranteed to continue so the Service was also looking at upskilling current staff. The emphasis would be on the more effective use of current resources.

The panel asked what input the Service had to the training of panel members. Philip Morgan-Klein advised that in terms of decision making the panel were provided with reports from social workers which included recommendations on the most appropriate actions. The Service recognised that the quality of these reports was important. Rose Mary Glackin advised that Children's Hearings Scotland had a well developed training scheme in place. Falkirk Council provided the Area Support Team support for four areas: Clackmannanshire; Falkirk; Stirling, and West Lothian. The work of this team had received national recognition as best practice. There was a

training event for panel members taking place at which the Council's Depute Chief Governance Officer and a Social Work Service Manager would be speaking.

Members asked if there was an indication of the capital and revenue spending which would be required to implement the infrastructure, capacity and transformational change for the delivery of early years education. Tony Bragg stated that he would provide this information to members after the meeting.

Decision

The performance panel noted the report.

Councillor McCabe left the meeting during consideration of the following item.

PP30. Development Services Performance Update

The panel considered a report by the Director of Development Services setting out a summary of performance for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 December 2016. Douglas Duff provided an overview of the report.

Members asked what forms of communication would be made available to roads staff and operatives when mobile working was introduced. Douglas Duff stated that staff would be provided with mobile phones which would provide alerts if there were supply issues.

The panel asked for further information on the charging options available for electric cars in the area. Douglas Duff advised that the Council's electric pool vehicles were based at Council buildings and used charging points available there. There was a proposal for an electric vehicle hub at Falkirk Stadium which would have up to 40 charging points any associated fees for use would form part of the business case once developed. In response to a question on fast charge points he stated that there would likely be a need to increase provision as more electric cars were on the road. The Council currently spends £1million on mileage and any potential savings would be pursued.

Members asked if the reported increase in tourism had resulted in an increase to the number of overnight stays made by visitors. Douglas Duff stated that the Kelpies had had over 1 million visitors in the first year and that there had been over 700,000 in the second year. Visitor nights had been increasing and the Service had a target to increase tourist accommodation by 20%. A local Premier Inn had increased its capacity by 60 bedrooms. There had also been an increase in the provision of glamping. He stated that he would provide the figures to members after the meeting.

The panel sought further information on the implementation of decriminalised parking enforcement. Douglas Duff stated that the decision had been taken following Police Scotland's indication that they would no longer deliver parking enforcement. There was a need to modernise the infrastructure at a cost of over £500,000 which included signage, line painting and the recruitment of wardens.

Members asked about the sickness absence level in the Service. Douglas Duff advised that a lot of work was carried out on tackling sickness absence but that improvements in the figures were limited due to the amount of long term illness. Measures to manage this had been implemented with occupational health and staff were being trained on safe working practices to avoid extra physical strain. He highlighted that the balance of the Service had shifted toward manual and craft staff. Alex Finlay stated that the figures for sickness absence for the Service's craft staff were comparable to industry standards.

The panel asked if the review of the environmental health, trading standards & community safety would result in closer work with Housing. Douglas Duff stated that there was already close working in place and that there were agreements in place on how to handle cases involving Council tenants and private renters.

Members sought for information on the Investment Zone and what investment activity was currently taking place. Douglas Duff stated that the confidence of investors varies and was linked to national political discussions. He stated that Grangemouth is estimated to contribute 4% of Scotland's GDP and that the rest of the economy relies on the fuel produced there. There had been a £450million programme of investment at the site including a new head quarters. It was estimated that there were seven jobs created for each job created in the chemicals industry.

The panel sought further information on the Council's letting of commercial properties. Douglas Duff stated that the properties were 95% let and that there was good engagement with businesses which allowed flexibility where required.

Members asked for further information on the digital boost programme. Douglas Duff stated that the Scottish Government had launched its new digital strategy which covered the whole economy and entirety of the public sector. In order to conduct more business online there was a need to modernise the process. Digital boost helps companies through access to training. This included information on how to use the tools to conduct business effectively online such as social media and online ordering.

The panel asked about the resourcing of environmental health. Douglas Duff stated that there had been concerns about the resource available but that this was being worked through. There had been a period in 2015/16 where four officers had left the team close together resulting in the appointment of an interim manager, co-ordinator and temporary staff.

These staff were now fully trained and working at the expected level and discussions were ongoing regarding making the temporary posts permanent.

Members asked what impact was expected to programmes funded through the European Social Fund after the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. Douglas Duff stated that there had been assurances from Ministers that established programmes would be maintained in the short term, the longer term position was unknown.

The panel asked what the position was regarding lock-ups as part of Denny Town Centre Phase 2. Douglas Duff advised that the possibility of demolition was being looked at.

Members asked why the cost per planning application was higher in Falkirk than the national benchmark. Douglas Duff stated that there were different factors in each local authority including the complexity of applications and that increases in the time to determine increase cost. He would provide information on this after the meeting.

The panel asked for a breakdown of the £9.9million which had been spent as part of Denny Town Centre regeneration and Denny Eastern Access Road. Douglas Duff stated that this information would be provided after the meeting.

Members asked about the increasing pressure on local cemeteries and highlighted that it took 10 years to progress a site from open space to being operational as a cemetery. Douglas Duff stated that the Service was working on planning for additional provision. Any new site would need to meet SEPA requirements. The work was at an early stage but potential sites were being looked at. He stated that he would provide the available information to members after the meeting.

The panel asked for an update on the work to finalise and publish the Local Flood Risk strategies. Douglas Duff stated that a significant amount of work had been focussed on Grangemouth as the Scottish Government had identified this as a priority site and had allocated funding for the work. Airth had been included in some of the additional survey work.

Members asked about the anti-idling initiative. Douglas Duff stated that this was work undertaken with the Scottish Government on air quality management. Publicity materials had been used to discourage idling; the approach was proactive rather than punitive. The Service had worked in a targeted way with logistics firms to encourage good practice in fleet management which had resulted in 30 firms signing up.

Decision

The performance panel noted the report.