

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Performance Panel held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 19 October 2017 at 9.30 am.

Core Members: David Balfour
Joan Coombes (convener)
Nigel Harris
Laura Murtagh
Pat Reid

Members

Attending: David Alexander
Adanna McCue
Cecil Meiklejohn
Lynn Munro

Officers: Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Philip Morgan-Klein, Service Manager (Children's Services)
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

PP1. Appointment of Convener

Councillors Reid and Harris nominated Councillor Coombes.

Decision

The Panel agreed to appoint Councillor Coombes as convener.

PP2. Apologies

No apologies were intimated.

PP3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

PP4. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 23 March 2017 was approved.

PP5. Rolling Action Log

A rolling action log detailing the status of actions from the meeting held on 23 2017 which had yet to be completed was presented for consideration.

The panel discussed the outstanding actions and sought clarification as to timescale to produce the report on the impact of the economic development strategy which had been requested in October 2016.

Decision

The rolling action log was noted.

PP6. Performance Panel - Service Reporting Framework Format

The panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services setting out a revised framework for reporting to the Panel, and a timetable of meetings together with a reporting schedule.

The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement gave an overview of the reporting process, describing the links between scrutiny of performance and service improvement. She also described the relationship between the Performance Panel and the Scrutiny Committee, highlighting the fact that issues raised by the panel were highlighted to the committee through its minutes and demonstrating that the panel was able to influence the Council's Scrutiny Plan.

The reporting format had been revised to provide information on how Services are contributing to the corporate plan and the Strategic Outcomes and Local Delivery Plan (SOLD). Previously the reports had focussed on performance indicators. While these would continue to be provided, the context and challenges with which Services operate will now be addressed. The framework will demonstrate the link between performance and improvement.

Members generally welcomed the new report format, commenting however that it would be helpful if benchmarking information was provided to give wider context highlighting in particular the Local Government Benchmarking Framework information as an example of benchmarking data. Similarly, members considered whether the performance statement should include timescales for project delivery. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement stated in response that the format was new and would need to be bed in but the format could be revised to include benchmarking and timescales if it was considered to be beneficial to members.

The panel noted that a number of questions had not been responded to at the previous meeting in March and that the Service had undertaken to provide responses afterwards in writing. Panel members sought assurance that outstanding questions would be answered. The Democratic Services

Manager confirmed that each would have been provided and would circulate the response to members of the committee. Given the breadth of service information provided in each report, it was difficult to ensure that all questions put at a meeting would be answered by the officers present. It was hoped that the number which could not be responded to would be minimal. Officers intended to meet with Scrutiny Committee and Performance Panel core members to discuss the scrutiny process from preparation ahead of meetings to the meeting itself in order to ensure effective scrutiny.

Decision

The performance panel:-

- (1) noted the framework reporting, and**
- (2) agreed the meetings timetable and reporting schedule.**

Councillor McCue joined the meeting at this point.

PP7. 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 April 2017 to September 2017. Philip Morgan-Klein provided an overview of the report.

The report provided information on:-

- significant challenges and changes in service pressures since the last update;
- an update on the relevant underpinning strategies; and
- progress towards achieving priorities and outcomes set out in the Corporate Plan, the Strategic Outcomes and Local Delivery plan (SOLD), the Council of the Future projects, areas of reform and set out performance against service indicators.

The Director of Children's Services gave an overview of key issues set out in the report, in particular in regard to the challenges and risks which the service faces together with an update on the strategies which underpin the service provided, notably:-

- the National Improvement Framework (NIF);
- the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF);
- the strategic review of children and families;
- the redesign of the Criminal Justice Team; and

- the replacement of the Social Work Information System (SWIS).

The Director gave, in response to questions, details on the current position of the process to procure a replacement for the Social Work Information System (SWIS). The specification for the system had been finalised and would now be put to the market. A system would be procured following a detailed evaluation. He envisaged that the system would allow seamless access to information and would enable both mobile and flexible working with officers able to update records whilst out of office. The current system was approximately 20 years old and was no longer fit for purpose. It was envisaged that information would be backed up onto the cloud and that this would be managed by the provider, however the detail would be determined at the project evaluation stage. In response to a question, the Director confirmed that the tender specification had been designed in consultation with users, including Adult Services work staff. It would support all functions. He envisaged a 9 month training programme before the new system went live. Benefits in a single system will include the eradication of the current barriers to accessing information within and across functions and standardised workflow across functions.

In response to a question in regard to difficulties in recruiting carers in the voluntary sector, Philip Morgan-Klein confirmed that one service provider had experienced difficulty in recruiting and had to suspend its activities. The challenge was to improve the commissioning process in order to attract volunteers to the caring role. The Service was actively seeking to attract volunteers and was working with a number of providers. He highlighted as an example the issues faced in providing carers for differing age groups noting that the transition from one age group to another can be difficult for providers given the differing requirements from one group to another.

The panel then discussed the Local Government Benchmarking Framework information which had been collated by the Improvement Service and considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 17 August 2017 (ref SC X). This provided year on year performance information together with comparison nationally and against other Scottish Local Authorities. Members stated that it would be helpful for performance reports to include benchmarking data. The Director of Children's Services agreed that comparison can be worthwhile but stressed that context was crucial. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement asserted that the purpose of benchmarking information was to prompt scrutiny by members and as such was worthwhile. Whether or not the comparative data was robust was irrelevant to a degree. By providing comparison members and officers will ask questions of our own performance and this will lead to improvement.

Following a question, the Director of Children's Services gave an update on the current position in regard to the establishment of Regional Collaboratives. The Leaders and the Chief Executives of the Clackmannanshire, Stirling, Falkirk and West Lothian Councils had recently discussed a joint approach and a report would be submitted to each

Council's Education Committee by 10 November setting out the approach for approval.

The panel then discussed the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) in detail. In response to a question, The Director of Children's Services confirmed that if all schools' attainment was raised then the attainment gap would not close. The aim would be to introduce interventions with schools which would raise attainment in the school in question. The interventions would be targeted and specific. The PEF would be split between literacy (25%); numeracy (25%) and health and wellbeing (50%). The funding was not available for nursery schools and no money would be allocated beyond S3.

Members then sought further information in regard to the SOLD outcome – our population will be healthier and sought further detail on how this would apply to Looked After Children or those on the Child Protection Register. In response, the Director of Children's Services confirmed that a number of projects were ongoing. Work was ongoing, at the prevention and early intervention stages, for example with the Children's Reporter to look at alternative options, the aim being to prevent children getting further into the system. The Director stated that as part of the strategic review of social work, a central credo was around family support was that early intervention can longitudinally prevent children coming into care. He then summarised the key thinking around the review, identifying early intervention projects. In regard to Looked After Children, the Director, following a question, indicated that Falkirk was slightly below the national average, although when broken down a higher than average proportion were in residential care with fewer in kinship care. The service was looking at how to reduce the number within the residential care and family support system, citing North Lanarkshire Council as a source of good practice. In regard to the costs for residential care (between £2,500 and £5,000 per week), the Director stated that innovative approaches should be considered to reduce the overall costs to the Council giving as an example a proposal to significantly increase the payments to kinship carers.

In response to a question in regard to welfare rights, the Director summarised the processes in place to work with services and cited Council of the Future and workstreams to achieve better cooperation which would achieve benefit maximisation. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement summarised lessons learned from Local Authorities such as East Lothian Council, including a web based benefits entitlement calculator to assist benefit support ahead of universal credit rollout in 2018, and gave examples of training for Children's Services staff in benefits awareness and of online support, all aimed at helping young people not overreach.

Councillor Reid left the meeting at this point.

In response to a question the Director confirmed that all options for the provision of continuing care, including residential halls, were still on the table. The previous age limit for this had been 18 but was now 21. The Director summarised the impact of this change on the service and on

budgets. He confirmed that contingency plans were in place if at 18 a young adult who had been in care did not need support but then at (for example) 19 wished to return to the system.

The Director then explained the term “asset based approach” to social work intervention to develop more creative and lower cost ways of supporting children and families. This, he said, was a nuanced approach around the totality of what is around a child. He then explained, following a question, the term “positive destination”. This, he explained, could be work, further or higher education or training. In 2015/16, 95% of school leavers reached a positive destination. This indicator showed that the role of the school was not simply to educate. In response to a question as to whether it was possible to provide attainment results by school, the Director advised against it. He explained that such information could be misinterpreted and misused, with damaging consequences.

Following a question in regard to work with families, the Director stressed that it was a “Children’s Service” rather than “education” and “social work”. He gave an example at Langlees Primary, of an attendance project whereby an officer would target visits and support to pupils with poor attendance. This early intervention, funded by the PEF, would benefit the wider family and other pupils in the family.

The Director then stated the current Early Years model will change to introduce more options and to support a blended approach.

The panel returned to the Pupil Equity Fund, which was ongoing until 2020, and discussed whether Council may wish to scrutinise, through a scrutiny panel, whether the interventions here succeeded in closing the attainment gap. The Director explained that the Council would report to the Scottish Government in June 2018 on what the PEF had been used for. He explained that rationale which could be used to measure the “attainment” gap and suggested that year on year comparison may not be useful whereas tracking individual children’s results could be more useful, although this would be a bigger project.

Decision

The performance panel noted the report.