

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Performance Panel held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 14 December 2017 at 9.30 am.

Core Members:

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

Members

David Alexander

Attending:

John McLuckie

Officers:

Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Kenny Gillespie, Head of Housing
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing Services
Bryan Smail, Chief Finance Officer

PP8. Apologies

No apologies were intimated.

PP9. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

PP10. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 19 October 2017 was approved.

PP11. Corporate and Housing Services Performance Update – April – October 2017

The panel considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services setting out a summary of performance for the period April 2017 to October 2017. Stuart Ritchie 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
- 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 panel asked a question about the Council's complaints procedure and the number of complaints responded to at stage one within the five day timescale. Stuart Ritchie advised that 86% of responses for the year to date met the timescale. The target was that 100% of responses meet the timescale as set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) but it was acknowledged that this could not be achieved. The service was looking at ways to be smarter and improve its responses. On a weekly basis the service contacted the relevant officers who were handling complaints which were nearing their deadline for response. This prompting had helped to improve performance against the target. The service also worked to ensure that complainants were kept up to date with the progress of their complaint. Communication was central to this process, particularly when advising complainants that additional time was required to further investigate the matter raised. Other councils took a broadly similar approach. Previously information was reported to the panel which showed the amount of time taken to respond to complaints which were dealt with outwith the five day target. Stuart Ritchie stated that we would provide this information to members after the meeting.

Members then discussed the reaction of the service to concerns relating to fires at high rise flats following the Grenfell Tower tragedy. Kenny Gillespie advised that the service had implemented a range of additional measures to provide reassurance for tenants. Continuing safety checks were being undertaken by the service along with quarterly checks by the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

The panel highlighted that the procurement team received the 2017/18 Scottish Government Opportunities Procurement Innovation/Initiative Award. It was recognised that procurement was a particularly important area for the Council especially going forward with continued budget pressures. The panel expressed their congratulations to the team for their success.

Members discussed the Customer First system for raising enquiries and complaints and stated that when a matter was urgent a flexible approach was required to facilitate more direct communication between the service and members. It was also raised that members had an obligation to recognise that there could be service delivery priorities which needed to come before their own enquiries.

A question was asked about instances of housing repairs not being fully completed or where the work carried out required follow up visits to address issues in performance. Kenny Gillespie stated that there were occasions where tradespeople were recalled to jobs, however the service carried out inspections and checks on work undertaken. Recalls accounted for 0.4% of the total number of jobs undertaken. Where issues with performance were identified appropriate action to address was taken.

Members asked if there was an issue with the systems which meant that there were occasions where tenants were waiting on repair works to be carried out but these jobs were marked as closed before they were completed. Kenny Gillespie stated that if tradespeople attended a property but could not obtain access they would leave a card for the appointment to be rearranged. If nothing further was heard back from the tenant then the job gets closed although it is not charged. Additionally there could be instances of human error. The workflow team was looking at the process in the East to identify ways of smartening the process.

The panel asked for information on the support to people who due to damage to their properties needed to be rehoused on a short term basis. Kenny Gillespie advised that in weather emergency situations mainstream void properties were used. Homelessness properties were used as the first choice. Wherever possible the service used its own stock and would avoid utilising alternative provision such as bed and breakfast services. The services removals team would also transfer people's possessions to their temporary accommodation in order to give them a sense of home.

There was discussion on rough sleeping and how to best signpost services to those individuals. Kenny Gillespie advised that there was signposting in place but that whether to use the available services was up to the individuals concerned. He stated that the service's homelessness officers knew the individuals who were sleeping rough and checked on their wellbeing regularly. Fiona Campbell stated that the issue with rough sleeping was significantly different across council areas, the issue in Falkirk was not the same as that in Glasgow. The service would look at including information on the Council website to publicise the available services.

The report advised that discussions were ongoing with the Scottish Government to secure additional funding as the current total funding available was not sufficient to meet the full Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP). Kenny Gillespie stated that the SHIP was a very ambitious programme which had attracted a good level of Scottish Government funding. The SHIP covered a three year period and there was sufficient funding in place for years one and two. There would be regular updates to members on the SHIP and they would be advised of any shortfall in funding at the appropriate time.

The panel discussed the heating in the Council's flatted properties and asked if combination heat and power (CHP) would be installed throughout.

Kenny Gillespie stated that there would be CHP in some and new systems in others. CHP was primarily used for properties within Calendar Park.

Members asked for further information on work to support local businesses. Stuart Ritchie advised that a number of procurement workshops relating to the quick quotes system had been held with local businesses to help them tender for public sector contracts. Scotland Excel produced information which showed the percentage expenditure of each Council on suppliers in its area and what the other 31 areas spend on those Falkirk based suppliers. Scotland Excel stated that the service's workshops had made businesses across the public sector more accessible to Falkirk based businesses.

There was then discussion on the Council's contact centre. There could occasionally be long waits to get through, members asked if additional phone lines could go live when the centre was busy. Stuart Ritchie stated that the project to replace the contact centre's telephony was underway. The new system would be a significant improvement on the current offering. This would include the ability to use recorded messages to deal with calls regarding known significant incidents so the public could get information without waiting for their call to be answered. The centre was able to draw on additional resources when needed. A recent example was when a water pipe burst outwith core hours, an additional four staff were brought in to assist with call handling.

The panel discussed the digital strategy and MyFalkirk tool, commenting on a good briefing which had been delivered to members. Fiona Campbell stated that the service aimed to make the system an end to end process, which had been achieved in relation to the bin collection service. Whether enquiries were made by phone or online they needed to feed into the same system. Work would target making the system efficient and eliminating any failures. A review was being undertaken with the revenue and benefits section to review how the system was working for their processes a year after having gone live.

Members asked what the impact had been on housing staff following the withdrawal of environmental health from attending nuisance calls. Kenny Gillespie stated that there had not been a significant influx of additional work to the conflict resolution team but that the service was monitoring this closely.

The panel asked how the service notified staff if they were to attend a property which may pose them a risk. Kenny Gillespie advised that there was a flag system in place which would indicate to staff where, for example, a property should only be visited in pairs. However, the service was aware of its requirements to data protection and confidentiality; specifics were only made available to those who needed to know. There was a protocol in place for sharing information with other services so all staff were protected. Staff were also issued with personal safety alarms. Following a question, Kenny Gillespie advised that if a tenant moved addresses then the system was updated to ensure the relevant flagging was in place.

Members expressed concerns that there were occasions where Council services or partner organisations knew of risk properties but elected members did not, putting their personal safety at risk. Stuart Ritchie gave an undertaking that he would take this matter away and look at how to deal with it. Further discussion highlighted that when elected members advised staff of the details of properties they were planning to attend they were given advice if risks were known. The panel asked the Director to write to all members advising them of the procedures in place for home visits and advising them to seek officers' advice in the first instance. Further, a training session on this matter would be arranged. This training would also include information on risk assessment of surgeries.

The panel asked about the confidence of the service regarding data security through home working. Fiona Campbell stated that the secure technologies used for home working were more secure than staff taking home hard copy documents which could be easily mislaid. There was also an information audit being carried out. The audit of systems would remove areas of duplication and ensure that information was only held once and that the service knew who managed it. Other councils had spent several years developing this area but the service was confident it would have plans to address all data protection matters in time.

Members sought an update on Council of the Future and workload issues. Stuart Ritchie advised that all staff were under increased workload pressures. The need to do things differently was recognised. There would be quarterly update reports on the work of Council of the Future to the Executive. The service was looking at the resources required to deliver the ambitious change programme within Council of the Future both in terms of staffing and the use of external consultants as appropriate.

The panel sought an update on the indicator to do with co-production which had been given an amber status. Fiona Campbell stated that co-production was going to be used to deliver the best services possible for communities based on their needs. The service would work with communities to understand what they value and how that can be delivered. There would be workshops taking place early 2018. In the future communities would need to be more self sufficient to deliver some services as the Council dealt with increased budget pressure.

Decision

The Performance Panel noted the performance of Corporate and Housing Services over the period April to October 2017