

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of Meeting of the Performance Panel held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Friday 16 February 2018 at 11.00 am.

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

Members
Attending: David Alexander
Jim Blackwood
Adanna McCue
Niall Coleman
Cecil Meiklejohn
Lynn Munro
Robert Spears

Officers: Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Alex Finlay, Service Manager, Business Management
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

PP12. Apologies

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Provost Buchanan, Depute Provost Ritchie and Councillors Bouse, Garner and Grant.

PP13. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

PP14. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 14 December 2017 was approved.

The panel discussed action points set out in the minute. The Democratic Services Manager confirmed that personal protection training had been organised and that this would be delivered by Police Scotland shortly in

regard to personal safety when making home visits. Members highlighted examples within other public sector agencies, which allowed warning “flags” to be highlighted on information systems which allow staff and members to access the potential risk ahead of home visits and to act accordingly. Currently, internal systems did not permit access to such information. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement stated that a members’ workshop on the Corporate Risk Management (CRM) system would pick up these issues and pull together key action points. The Director of Development Services described a pilot system developed by her Service which could potentially be adjusted to highlight and warn of potential risks. Both the Director of Development Services and the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement undertook to analyse the pilot system which was for vulnerable people and assess the potential for it to be expanded to include known risks. Any system should be available for staff across services as well as elected members and partners and provide a single point for real time information to be accessed. Members highlighted the potential for data protection issues to be a barrier to cross service and member access, highlighting instances where known information had not been shared with members ahead of home visits.

Councillor McCue joined the meeting during consideration of the previous item.

PP15. Development Services Performance Update April – December 2017

The panel considered a report by the Director of Development Services setting out a summary of performance for the period April 2017 to December 2017. The Director of Development Services 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 Development Services highlighted:

- the progress made in delivering employment and training programmes to enable access to the workplace;
- the follow up review by Food Standards Scotland (FSS) in late 2017 which found that all action points from its first review (reported to the Scrutiny Committee on 30 November 2017 - ref S20) had been completed;

- Planning performance. The Scottish Government had reviewed the Council's planning policy and development management indicators and had awarded 12 green and 3 amber ratings for the Council's 15 indicators for the period April 2016 – March 2017;
- the award of quality management system accreditation for Bereavement Services in June 2017. The BSI 150 9001 certificate coincided with the opening of the refurbished crematorium facility in Falkirk.

Following a question, the Director of Development Services confirmed that the Strategic Property Review (SPR) and the draft revenue budget were aligned. It would not be the case that there would be investment planned for buildings which were not likely to remain on the Council's asset register. If an asset had been identified for disposal then there should not be funding planned for the establishment. The Director of Development Services confirmed that at risk properties which were run by Falkirk Community Trust were included within the overarching Strategic Property Review and that co-location of services was an option which was looked at as part of the SPR.

In regard to the funding of external organisations, The Director of Development Services confirmed that reduction of grant or removal of grant could impact on property and confirmed that Development Services had contributed to the preparation of budget savings options. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement added that as part of the SPR, partner agencies had been engaged and the review had looked at co-location with the Council and partners in order to deliver the best service to the community. The Director of Development Services confirmed that the SPR working group would meet following the budget setting meeting of Council on 28 February 2018 and that a report on the SPR would be submitted to the Executive thereafter.

Councillor Reid left the meeting at this point.

The panel then discussed Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) projects, commending the work of the community in progressing projects, citing Zetland Park in Grangemouth as an exemplar for community involvement.

Members highlighted the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) indicator for the cost of planning. The indicator had been reported to the Scrutiny Committee on 17 August 2017 (ref S6) with a follow up report submitted on 1 February 2018 (ref S29). A review of costs had shown an improvement in the Council's position relative to other Local Authorities (from 32nd to 25th). The Director of Development Services provided an analysis of the LGBF, conceding that while the framework, which was managed by the Improvement Service, was inconsistent, there was a need to review the Council's process. Members acknowledged that the LGBF data gathering procedures varied across the country and noted that the Scrutiny Committee had requested a further report on the data which was used to produce the Council's cost estimation.

The panel then discussed the indicator “Percentage of Trading Standards Business Advice Requests dealt with within 14 days”. This was 94.2% for 2017/8, compared with 98.1% in the previous year. The Director of Development Services described the current enquiry and complaints process and stated that there was currently a national review Trading Standards, in particular on how best to deliver the service, including how best to utilise the helpline facility.

Following questions in regard to performance in regard to employment training (indicators cms 001 – cms 003b) which showed a decline in the number of people supported, the Director of Development Services explained that the reduction in support was a direct consequence of reduced funding. Support was expensive and was a non-statutory function. This meant the budget was under threat as part of the overall reduced funding available to the Council. Nonetheless, the Director of Development Services argued that comparatively the numbers supported were high and commended the work of the Employment Training Unit. The service was successful in accessing external funding but this had predicated a shift from school leavers to the vulnerable. Reduced care funding was in place to support the former. As an area, fewer school leavers go on to higher and further education. This results in higher youth unemployment and a less skilled work force. Development Services works closely with Children's Services and Forth Valley College to direct pupils to the college. Forth Valley College, the Director stated, was an excellent college and it was disappointing that there seemed to be a reluctance among school leavers to take on courses there.

Following questions on the net number of new businesses supported and sustained which had been 213 in 2017/18 (compared to the target of 282) and which had dropped from 307 in 2015/16, the Director of Development Services cited economic uncertainty as a contributing factor, highlighting BREXIT as a key cause of uncertainty. In regard to the performance of the Business Gateway, the Director of Development Services explained that performance was reported externally and was compared with that of other Business Gateways. Nationally the picture was similar. She stressed that while the number of start-ups was important, it was equally important that new businesses are supported and sustained. The success of Grangemouth Investment Zone would, it was anticipated, encourage start-ups in the area – not only in business but also in the tourism sector.

The panel then discussed the SOLD aim to promote vibrant town centres and the actions identified to produce the required outcomes. Following questions on the refurbishment of Denny town centre, The Director of Development Services confirmed that there were issues to resolve relating to artwork which the Council was pursuing.

Members praised the BSI accreditation for Bereavement Service and praised the team led by Richard Broadley. They also praised the Services' record in taking on and developing Modern Apprentices across the Council and

praised the contribution of Modern Apprentices to the work of services across the Council.

In regard to Freedom of Information requests, the Director of Development Services stated that the target was 100% responded to within 20 days. In 2017/18, 265 had been made with 97.4% responded to within the deadline. While a number were complex, the Director of Development Services confirmed that in all cases her team aimed to meet the target.

Decision

The Performance Panel noted the performance of Development Services over the period April to December 2017