

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on wavy lines representing water. The top-right quadrant depicts a stag's head with large antlers. The bottom-left quadrant contains a beaver. The bottom-right quadrant shows a grizzly bear. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield reads "CITY OF VANCOUVER".

Agenda Item 4

Minute

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 6 June 2019 at 9.30 am.

Councillors: David Balfour
Lorna Binnie
Allyson Black
Niall Coleman
Lynn Munro (Convener)

**Councillors
in attendance for
Service
Performance
Reports:**

Laura Murtagh
Robert Spears

Officers: John Apperson, Property and Asset Manager
Steve Bentley, Housing Operations Manager
Sally Buchanan, Fairer Falkirk Manager
Carl Bullough, Head of Environmental Services
Paul Ferguson, Revenue and Benefits Manager
Douglas Gardiner, Waste Manager
Gary Greenhorn, Head of Planning and Resources
Cathy Megarry, Service Manager
Roger Morden, Performance Review Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing Services
Lesley Scott, Waste Strategy Co-ordinator

S9. Order of Business

The Convener advised that the first part of the meeting would consider the Corporate and Housing Services and Children's Services performance reports (agenda items 6 and 7) and reminded the committee and members present that this part of the meeting was open to all members of Council to attend and participate in. The Convener varied the order of business to allow these items to be taken first. The minute reflects the order in which items were taken.

S10. Apologies

Apologies were intimated from Councillors Blackwood, Goldie and Grant.

S11. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

S12. Minutes

Decision

- (a) The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 4 April 2019 was approved; and**
- (b) The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 14 February 2019 was noted.**

S13. Rolling Action Log

A rolling action log detailing the status of actions which had yet to be completed was presented for consideration.

Decision

The committee noted the Rolling Action Log and agreed to remove actions 454, 455, 456 and 457 from the log.

S14. Corporate & Housing Services Performance Update April 2018 – March 2019

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services setting out a summary of performance for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

The report provided information on;-

- Significant challenges and changes in Service pressure since the last update, and
- Progress towards achieving the priorities and outcomes within:-
- The Corporate Plan
- Council of the Future projects

- Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators

The report provided an update on the following workstreams:-

- Equal Pay
- Revenue Budget
- Universal Credit (UC)

It also provided an update on workstreams relating to the following strategies:-

- Workforce Strategy
- Council of the Future Change Programme
- Procurement Strategy
- Digital / Technology Strategy

The Committee discussed the impact of Universal Credit on rent arrears. Paul Ferguson confirmed a slight increase in rent arrears in 2018/19 of 0.2% which equated to £200k. He did not however anticipate a significant increase in 2019/20 following a full year of Full Universal Credit. It was advantageous that this was a 53 week payment year. He also cited East Lothian Council's experience where rent arrears had occurred for new claimants for Universal Credit. Those who remained on Universal Credit tended, it had been found, to be stable. The committee then discussed the Poverty Strategy and asked whether the Council had policies to reduce the stigma of poverty. Sally Buchanan confirmed that a subgroup of the Community Planning Partnership would look at poverty awareness and the stigma around poverty. In regard to the actions to deliver locality planning underpinned by community action plans (06.02 – CHS17) members questioned whether the status of 'on target' was accurate. While there had been workstreams initiated in the Grangemouth area, members considered that these had not delivered outcomes and the feeling in the community was that there had been no action for some time. Sally Buchanan confirmed that there were a number of workstreams ongoing but conceded that there could be better dialogue with the community to provide updates to the wider audience on what has happened and where the work was going. Stuart Ritchie proposed a meeting, having heard members concerns, with the local members in order to provide a full update.

The committee then considered action 14.03 – CH17 'encouraging our communities to participate in preparations for emergency events through community resilience', highlighting that work was significantly behind target. Such plans should, members stated, be a priority.

In regard to action COTF17.MD06 – ‘redesign of BMD services- phase 2’ the committee, recognising that members tended only to become involved when their constituents encounter problems with the Council, asked whether delays in completing works was done due to a lack of capacity. Members queried whether the Council employed sufficient numbers of trades people and whether the Council ‘grew its own’ – Stuart Ritchie stated that the length of time taken to complete repairs, emergency and non-emergency had decreased from 5 hours and 8 hours respectively in 2017/18 to 3.8 hours and 6.7 hours respectively in 2018/19. This was similar to the Scottish benchmark and better than the Service targets of 4.2 hours and 7 hours. While progress was being made, Mr Ritchie reflected that for the individual any time waiting is too long. In regard to recruitment the Council faced a struggle to recruit and retain tradespeople when the private sector was buoyant. However the Council did have a successful apprentice programme and did aim to ‘grow its own’.

The committee then raised the action – ‘housing of tomorrow’ and asked by what method success was measured. In particular members cited examples where the public had called the Council and had not received a response. The committee then discussed how members enquiries were measured and dealt with.

John Apperson explained that Housing used the Council’s Customer First System. Enquiries were logged and timescales were set for responses. It appeared, from members’ comments, that breakdown occurred in the follow-up process. The introduction of digital communications for gas and gas repairs services had been beneficial and the technology would be rolled out to kitchen fitters shortly. The availability of performance management data would, it was anticipated, result in improved service. It was important in the first instance that calls were logged onto Customer First. Members agreed, stating that the practice of following up on initial enquiries should be applied in practice Council wide. Mr Apperson stated that demand generated follow up calls and at the moment demand was high. He stated that 40% of calls were emergencies and by their nature the response cannot be planned. These required a 3 hour response. He again confirmed that if a call was logged on Customer First by staff then it would be tracked and actioned. Other methods of raising calls such as telephone, email and in writing could more easily not be logged and it was here that breakdowns could occur.

The committee noted that the Council was ‘awaiting an agreed way forward with Falkirk Community Trust’ in regard to action COTF17. EEC1 – implementation of the Central Advice Hub and spokes. However this would be raised at the Scrutiny Committee (External) review of the Trust’s performance later in the year.

The committee then returned to Customer First. It was recognised by members that those enquiries which were logged on the system were tracked and actioned. There appeared to be an issue when an enquiry was received but not logged. It was normally the case that members became

involved at a point beyond the breakdown in communication or when repairs hadn't been actioned and were 'trouble shooting'. Ideally, it was suggested, all enquires should be logged as a matter of course and members should be given full access to Customer First to allow them to interrogate the system and to feedback to constituents direct. Members asked whether all enquiries were logged onto Customer First. While they should be, Stuart Ritchie stated that evidently this was not the case. In the discussion members also recognised that not all elected members logged enquiries directly onto Customer First. For some this was cultural, having been used to using the phone to raise enquiries direct with officers, while for some there were training and familiarity issues. However there were concerns from members that whichever way they made an enquiry it should, regardless, be logged. Stuart Ritchie repeated that evidently not all enquiries were logged- it was often easier to take action to resolve an issue and having done so officers would be unlikely to then enter the enquiry on the system. Members of the committee accepted that this was the case and understood the logic of doing so but without data it was more difficult for patterns to be analysed for service improvement and it also caused breakdown in communication and in enquiries being actioned.

The discussion concluded with members of the committee agreeing that the matters discussed had been raised before in various forms and asked officers to look again at the use of Customer First and members' engagement with the system.

The committee turned to progress made in closing the gender pay gap. Stuart Ritchie cautioned that the Local Government Benchmarking Framework data did not provide context. The data showed that almost half of officers in the top 5% earners were women. This had changed over the previous two or so years due to various reasons. In regard to whether the Council supported female workers, Mr Ritchie stated that the data provided in the LGBF did not address the question.

The committee then returned to rent arrears. In terms of gross rent arrears, as measured by the LGBF Falkirk sat 16th at 7.7% (gross rent arrears as a % of rent due). Stuart Ritchie noted that the data was for 2017/18 and highlighted work which had been undertaken to reduce rent arrears. Early intervention was the key. The roles of the neighbourhood officers had been extended to include first line engagement. Housing staff were being trained to deal with rent arrears in the forthcoming weeks and it was anticipated that this would realise benefits. Paul Ferguson noted that Glasgow Housing Association had led on early intervention with exceptional results. The housing officer model would be rolled out on 10 June 2019 and in the early weeks would focus on training. At the start of July a personalised letter would be hand delivered to all tenants which would include named officer details.

The committee returned briefly to Customer First, suggesting that in some cases members were not advised when a piece of work was concluded.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) approved the report and acknowledged progress by the Sservice in meeting the Council's priorities;**
- (2) asked officers to review how Services input and manage enquiries with reference to Customer First. This to include a review of the use of, and engagement with, Customer First by elected members.**

The committee then adjourned at 10.35a.m. for a short break and reconvened at 10.45a.m.

S15. Children's Services – Performance Report as at 31 March 2019

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services setting out a summary of performance for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

The Director of Children's Services provided an overview of the report.

The report provided information on:-

- significant challenges, risks and changes in service pressures since the last update;
- relevant performance reports, audits and inspections
- progress towards achieving the priorities, outcomes and targets contained within:-
- the Corporate Plan
- Children's Services Service Plan; and
- Council of the Future Projects
- Local Government Benchmarking Framework Indicators

The report set out an update on the following workstreams;

- Family Support Services
- Foster Care recruitment
- Supported accommodation
- Procuring for the future

- Family First approach
- Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE)
- Best Practice in Child Protection Systems

An update on the following links to National Strategies was provided:-

- National Improvement Framework
- Scottish Attainment Challenge/ Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)

Additionally the Scrutiny Committee had asked, in December 2018 (ref S24) for information on the arrangements for engaging with staff groups and pupils in general and in particular in regard to the Regional Improvement Collaborative. The information was set out at paragraph 4.1 of the report.

The committee commended the Closer to Home Strategy noting the Council's spend on residential care and the intent to provide locally based care. Cathy Megarry in response to comments in regard in particular to proposals by the IJB to utilise Bield Care Home in Bonnybridge gave a detailed summation of the Closer to Home Strategy. The current position whereby the Council procured expensive out of area care was not sustainable. She concurred with members' comments that historically the Council did not have the appropriate capacity and gave a detailed overview of projects to grow our own provision. The aim was for children to be supported where they need to be, closer to or at home. There was a need to be sensitive to legacy placements and not to disrupt those already in care placements, hence the need for a 5 year strategy. In regard to foster care the Council was aiming to 'grow our own' rather than use more expensive agency Foster carers. Renewed marketing had seen double the number of enquiries but this had yet to translate into increased number of carers. There was strong competition from private contractors. Ms Megarry confirmed that the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan anticipated significant savings from the Closer to Home Strategy.

The committee discussed the progress of PAR.06.13 – CS17 – 'work with and support management committees and local groups to take over the running of their community halls' - and sought detail on the support offered to the community to take over local assets. Gary Greenhorn confirmed that the Education, Children and Young People Executive had, on 4 June 2019, agreed to lease 5 community halls. He explained that support continued post transfer. There was a dedicated CLD resource to support the community – in particular in regard to achieving charitable status and attracting external funding. Additionally he set out the intention to integrate the school estate into a community model. It was proposed that there would be an interface with Falkirk Community Trust to better utilise schools out with teaching hours. He

recognized that not all schools could be used in this way but work was underway to develop proposals for the PPP schools, whose contracts would end in 2025.

He recognized, in response to a question, that there was overlap in the facilities available in community halls, schools and sports centres but stated that each catered to different markets. For example community halls would not be suitable for badminton which required a higher ceiling. There was a need, he stated, to better market the facilities – not all assets were suitable for all groups. There had been an excess of 12,000 lets in the last year. The Council had to recognize where its strengths were and not compete, for example, with high end leisure markets such as gyms.

The committee discussed secondary school attendance rates. In 2015/16 attendance had been 91.4% and had been 90.7% in 2017/18. Members highlighted the link between attendance and attainment but also the need for parents to ensure that children were kept from school when suffering from contagious illnesses – for example the norovirus. In such cases the need to stay off conflicted with the drive of schools to praise high attendance. Robert Naylor stressed that in the case of illness the health of pupils should always come first. In regard to the attendance indicator Mr Naylor stated that attendance was monitored for each child and low attendance was monitored closely at school level. It was important to understand if low attendance was an indicator of domestic or personal issues or whether the pupil simply was not going to school. The causes of absence were clearly monitored. Overall an average attendance of 90% meant that 10% of pupils were only at school 9 days in a fortnight and this was not acceptable. He again stated that in the case of illness the pupil's health should come first. Following a question Mr Naylor outlined an initiative to promote psychical and mental health amongst pupils. There were a number of initiatives in place, funded by Pupil Equity Fund monies, around mental wellbeing. The Scottish Government had provided £15m for bespoke counselling services for schools with the aim of 1 counsellor in every school. There was a need to understand the difference between mental health issues and other issues such as stress and anxiety. Often these were conflated. It was a complex issue. The Service was in discussion with head teachers in regard to recognising signs and intervening early before mental health issues manifest themselves, or to deal with life events which lead to stress.

Members then considered performance in regard to numeracy and literacy and sought information on engagement with parents of pupils whose performance was below expectations. The Director explained that Early Learning provided greater engagement opportunities with parents, including home visits before pupils start at school. The introduction of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) had shown that significant intervention could take place at early stages. Where appropriate the Service was able to buy in additional targeted support. The performance was good and improving. PEF was aimed at closing the attainment gap and evidence showed that the gap was closing. Evidence showed that if by P1 pupils had not reached the required levels the chance of reaching it by P4 decreased so it was vital to target intervention at

the Early Years stage. Members concurred and praised a briefing by the Service to elected members on Early Years.

Following a question, Robert Naylor explained the term 'positive destinations' in regard to school leavers. This, he explained, had been called NEET – Not in Employment, Education or Training. The term had had negative connotations and carried a stigma. It had been changed to cover Further and Higher Education, employment, training or activity placements. The aspiration was that all school leavers would reach one of the positive destinations. The figure was around 95%. He explained that the aspiration showed the journey taken by Education Authorities over the years. Previously there had been little focus on what happened after pupils left school. Now, from S2, schools talk to pupils about where their journey will take them. He summarised work, for example, with Forth Valley College to develop a younger workforce with courses aimed at the needs of the workplace. Previously a proportion of the 16-24 population left school and become unemployed. This was less likely to happen now. Following a question Mr Naylor described an activity placement at Larbert High which had recently won an award. Members followed up on this explanation by asking whether the Service worked with employers, such as the NHS, to maximise opportunities for school leavers. Mr Naylor explained that the Service worked with Skills Development Scotland, formerly the Careers Service, to develop a programme of work experience. The Service also had links with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to link with a variety of different companies and organised 'job fairs' for pupils and companies. The area had a higher proportion of pupils who go on to employment, with a slightly lower proportion going to University. This possibly reflected the area's cultural links with industry. However this was changing and the Service was looking at future employment opportunities in STEM, the NHS and teaching. The aim was to provide a wide range of options and to equip pupils with a wide range of transferrable and adaptable skills. By planning their journey and having the range of opportunity, pupils were far less likely to leave school with no idea about what they wanted to do. In their lifetime pupils may have 7 or 8 jobs. The idea of a job for life was outdated. Additionally there was, as shown in the United States, an increasing number of self employed workers. Pupils therefore needed people and communication skills in addition to transferable and adaptable skills. Mr Naylor also anticipated an increase in jobs centred around creativity and 'thinking' with traditional 'factory' jobs undertaken by machines. Members then asked whether, given this, primary school teachers identified pupil's skills and advised their secondary schools before transition to secondary school. Mr Naylor confirmed that at transition to secondary school a 'pastoral' file was created for each and every child which included their strengths (e.g. of more likely to tend to science or the Arts etc) work was carried out in the primary sector to expose pupils to opportunities, for example through tasks from large companies. The aim was to expose pupils at an early stage to a range of activities and jobs.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the Service in meeting the Council's priorities.

S16. Fly Tipping Scrutiny Panel 6 Month Update Report

The committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services providing an update on the implementation of the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations on fly tipping.

In agreeing recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee following a scrutiny panel review, the Executive had, on 15 January 2019 (ref EX100), requested that update reports be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee after 6 and 12 months.

The 6 month update report provided a summary of progress in implementing each of the 8 recommendations. These were:

- 1) The Council undertake a comprehensive review of the cost and charging for fly tipping to ensure the Council is covering all costs including disposal. This in turn should inform charging for removing fly tipping which should be at full cost recovery including an additional fine.
- 2) That residents including tenants are reminded of their obligations to dispose of rubbish and waste appropriately. For tenants this can be achieved through reminders of their tenancy obligations under the housing tenancy agreement particularly those who live in flats. The issue of supporting tenants needs to be considered along with how we deal with fly tipping in urban areas. This issue needs to be considered by both Development Services and Housing Services.
- 3) A report is presented to a future Executive on the potential for establishing a trusted trader's scheme taking account of the discussions that took place within the panel.
- 4) Officers review access to civic amenity centre to ensure it is available to those who require to use it, that people can pay where appropriate at the site, that budget options are understood in terms of their consequences on small businesses, people without transport etc.
- 5) Officers review enforcement, the fee structure and bulky uplifts policy to encourage public to use this in conjunction with the civic amenity site and report back to the Executive on this in due course. This should include an approach to education, advice and support for community organisations, younger people, tenants including private sector and small.

- 6) The Council adopts a one Council approach to fly tipping. This would include utilising MyFalkirk as the platform for reporting and managing the service. In addition, it is recommended that there is a review of management of the various elements of the service into one designated team and this is reported back to Members in due course.
- 7) Officers investigate and report back on establishing a freecycle/reuse scheme for items of furniture etc. to be developed in conjunction with the 3rd sector.
- 8) The Council reviews its engagement with the communities to enable them to support the Council in tackling fly tipping and general litter picks.

Members of the committee noted the progress made to date, recognising that further work would have to be done to realise the recommendations and for the benefits to become tangible. Following a question, Carl Bullough confirmed that the number of uplifts had increased in the 6 month period but the number of instances of fly tipping had increased slightly. He added that the new practices would have to bed in and that they would be applied with common sense, for example in regard to the number of items that can be uplifted.

Councillor Coleman, who had been a member of the scrutiny panel, stated that in regard to the review of the costs of Fly Tipping (recommendation 1), the intention of the panel had been that there would be full cost recovery by the Council and that the Council would charge those who fly-tipped. He emphasised that where the perpetrator could be identified they should meet the full costs to the Council of disposing of fly-tipped waste. Where material was left on non-Council land it was the responsibility of the landowner to dispose of the waste. It was the view of the panel that if they did not, that the Council should remove it and charge the landowner at full cost.

In regard to establishing a trusted trader scheme (recommendation 3), Councillor Coleman considered that there was more work to do and stated that there were models in place elsewhere which could be investigated. He emphasised that any scheme should stress the benefits to the trader and that any scheme should be of benefit to the traders – either financially through reduced waste disposal costs or reputationally through inclusion on a published and promoted list of trusted traders.

Councillor Coleman welcomed, as a former scrutiny panel member, the work done to introduce a 'One Council' approach to dealing with Fly Tipping (recommendation 6). He emphasised that in making the recommendation, the intent of the panel was to bring about a more efficient system – both in terms of public accessibility and in order to drive down instances of fly tipping through education and, importantly, enforcement. He cited the model adopted by North Ayrshire Council as an example.

In response to Councillor Coleman's clarification of the intent behind the panel's recommendations Carl Bullough concurred with the points made and

stated that these were understood by his team and the changes being implemented would reflect the panel's intentions.

Councillor Black, who had chaired the scrutiny panel, welcomed the update but expressed concerns over the Service's capacity to deliver on the recommendations noting the time taken to deliver on them thus far and the lack of meaningful progress in regard to some, the introduction of a freecycle scheme and Trusted Trader Scheme, for example. She also stressed the need for education to complement enforcement. It was important that householders understood their responsibilities.

In regard to the change in opening hours of the civic amenity sites, Councillor Black suggested that while the service had received few complaints she was aware of negative social media around this. Councillor Black highlighted the panel's recommendation that a freecycle scheme be introduced and stressed the value of such a scheme. Examples were given by members of community Freecycling schemes in Germany but both Councillors Black and Coleman stated that the intent of the panel was to see the Council, working with the voluntary sector, introduce an organised scheme.

The Democratic Services Manager explained that the recommendations of the panel had been accepted by the Scrutiny Committee and by the Executive. These were now formal decisions of the Executive and would be taken forward by officers as such. There was no ambiguity in the Executive's decision. Given the positive and instructive input from former panel members it was suggested that officers liaise with the former panel members as they progress the Executive's decision and use the members' experience to shape their recommendations.

Decision

The Committee noted the progress being made towards achieving the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations in regard to Fly Tipping.

S17. Progress on Scrutiny Panel Recommendations for Looked After Children

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services providing a summary overview of the work resulting from the recommendations of the Looked After Children Scrutiny Panel which concluded in November 2016.

The Committee had, on 13 December 2018 (ref S24) requested an update on the progress made in implementing the findings of a scrutiny panel review of Looked After Children. The panel's recommendations had been accepted by the Scrutiny committee on 17 November 2016 (ref S21) and agreed by the Executive on 29 November 2016 (ref EX85). The report provided an update in regard to the panel's 7 recommendations. These were:-

- 1) Relationships between young people and those involved in their care are key to developing positive outcomes. The principles of Relationship Based Practice therefore need to be developed and embedded by all relevant professionals.
- 2) The named persons in all services are appropriately trained and supported to recognise the specific needs of Looked After children and young people in order to lift their aspirations and improve outcomes, especially in education.
- 3) Mental health services are aligned to meeting the needs of Looked After children and that these are provided appropriately.
- 4) Attainment is a priority, particularly for Looked After children including those Looked After At Home through promoting attendance and engagement in learning. To achieve this:-
 - a practice model is developed to assess the improvement in learning that has been achieved during the period of being Looked After;
 - an educationally rich care environment is put in place for all children Looked After Away From Home.
- 5) Undertake a review of Falkirk Council foster carer provision with a view to increasing the number of care placements available. This review would include the following:-
 - Consideration of the outcome from work streams from the National Review of Foster Care, which are expected to report in the near future.
 - Review fees and allowances for foster carers, noting that the outcome of the National Review of Allowances may impact on this.
 - How to use creative and innovative ways to engage with prospective foster carers.
 - Support for foster carers.
- 6) Investigate and report back to Members on the potential for spend to save proposals in regards to providing more local provision for those children currently Looked After out with of the Falkirk Council area.
- 7) It is recommended that the proposals for the Champions Board are approved and that the Executive Group of the Community Planning Partnership agree a reporting framework for taking forward actions within individual organisations.

The recommendations now fell within a larger 5 year strategic plan, Closer to Home. The key principle of the Closer to Home Strategy was that children and young people, wherever possible should be brought up within the environment of their own family. The aim of the strategy was to reduce reliance on external foster and residential care. The progress made on the panel's recommendations reflected their place within the Closer to Home Strategy. This had been explained to the committee earlier in the meeting during consideration of Children's Services Performance report (item S15).

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the progress made across all of the Scrutiny Panel recommendations as detailed in appendix 1 of the report.