

S23. Development Services Performance Update – January to June 2019

The panel considered a report by the Director of Development Services setting out a summary of performance for the period 1 January to 30 June 2019. The Director of Development 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

The Director of Development Services provided an update on the following workstreams:-

- Revenue Budget
- Strategic Property Review
- Waste recycling and compliance with the Household Waste Recycling Charter
- Smart Working Smart Travel
- Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme
- Decriminalisation Parking Enforcement (DPE)
- Falkirk Tax Incremental Financial (TIF) /Investment Zone
- Welfare Reform/Fair Start
- Town Centres

She also gave an update on the following strategies:-

- Local Development Plan (LDP2), which was agreed by the Council in June 2019 following a period of consultation
- Dig in Falkirk, the local food growing strategy which has been the subject of consultation
- Revised Core Plans Path was finalised after a consultation was completed

Mrs Geisler also provided an update in regard to the following:-

- Development Services (Roads and Engineering Design) Quality Management System – ISO 9001 : 2015
- the Planning Performance Framework

In regard to performance, which was set out in the appendices to the report, Mrs Geisler highlighted:-

- the progress of the TIF in particular in regard to the crossing at Westfield
- a bid made by the Lottery Heritage Fund in regard to Zetland Park in Grangemouth
- Brexit preparations
- Impact of the Falkirk Townscape Heritage Initiative

- the Strategic Property Review

Following a question on the suite of performance indicators which were reported to the committee, the Director explained that those included in the LGBF, or when an aspect of the service had been deemed as not to have been performing well by an external reviewer, by scrutiny reviews, or by internal assessment, would be reported to the Committee.

The committee discussed the cost of the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme. Different sums had been quoted in the report (£132m and £180m). The Director undertook to confirm the correct figure. In response to a question in regard to the measures to protect Skinflats the Director explained that the area was subject to Coastal, Pleuvial and Fleural Flooding so the Grangemouth scheme would tie in with neighbouring flood prevention schemes to protect areas such as Skinflats. Where possible measures would include using natural measures such as tree planting; attenuation.

The committee discussed the potential impact of Brexit, particularly in a no deal situation, on the Investment Zone aims and on Grangemouth in particular, given the recent reporting of the Government's Yellowhammer document which had suggested that oil refineries would close as a consequence of a no deal Brexit. The Director stated that the Council had been assessing the risks in conjunction with the Scottish Government and she was unaware of any risk of closure of Grangemouth Refinery. The Scottish Government's planning assumptions had not factored in the assumptions set out in Yellowhammer; if there were to be an impact it may be in regard to tariffs. This made investment from the Scottish Government more vital. It may be that the area would be affected indirectly for example if refineries closed then this could lead to industrial action at Grangemouth. It was important to analyse the detail of Yellowhammer. A briefing on Brexit and the impact of Yellowhammer on the council's preparations would be held for all members. Preparations were already underway, in areas such as the provision of care and in food supply. The Director was confident the Council's preparations were sound. Following a question in regard to the Smart Working Smart Travel project the Director advised that 60 new pool vehicles had been delivered, with 30 more to follow in 2019/20. The aim was to reduce travel costs and achieve budget savings. The project was capital investment with revenue benefits flowing from a reduction in staff mileage claims. There was a hierarchy for travel and if staff had to drive they were encouraged to use pool cars. The fleet was green, with a large proportion of vehicles being electric.

Following a question in regard to the Tax Incremental Financing and roadworks in Grangemouth the Director stated that the £10m gap, resulting from the £90m project receiving £50m from the Scottish Government, needed to be closed. Road improvements would be addressed through the Investment Zone growth deal, including access to Grangemouth town centre. Following a question as to whether this included preventing HGVs using the town centre to access industry the Director stated that the project included access to the town centre. In response to a question on the frequency of gully clearing in Grangemouth the Director undertook to

provide detail following the meeting.

The committee returned to Yellowhammer and stated that there was an urgent need to ensure there were adequate food supplies in place ahead of Brexit and that plans were in place to deal with food shortages. If the worst case scenario as set out in Yellowhammer unfolded the Council would play a key role in supporting the local community. The Director stated that the Scottish Government planning assumptions had included food supplies and this was covered in the council's planning. In this respect Yellowhammer had contained no new information. The Director stated that the significant long term issues would be around the impact on the economy. The Scottish Government's Chief Economist had predicted that the UK economy would see a short sharp shock and that the consequences could be significant. The Council was engaged with the Scottish Government as part of its readiness preparations. For example the Business Gateway team had been actively supporting local businesses to prepare. There was particular risk for small and medium businesses as they were unlikely to have spare resources to mitigate the impact.

The committee returned to the issue of HGVs using Grangemouth town centre to access industry. There was, it was stated, a lack of facilities in the town for HGV parking. This had, it was stated, been raised as a concern for a number of years. The Director repeated that roads infrastructure was part of the Investment Zone business case and that there would be a report to the Executive on 29 October 2019 on the Investment Zone. It was stated in reply that HGVs did impact on the town centre with car parks used as toilet facilities by drivers. In response to a statement that the Council had not been addressing the situation the Director disagreed and repeated that there was a project to look at this in the shorter term.

The committee turned to waste recycling and sought detail on the current saving projections. The Director stated that the overspend was previously in the order of £1.4m. The aim of the project was to deliver a service that was Charter Compliant. An approach to service delivery had been agreed by the Executive earlier in the year and funding had been secured from Zero Waste Scotland. The rollout of the "burgundy" bin would be complete soon. It was anticipated that the new collection and disposal service would produce efficiency savings which would contribute to budget reduction savings. For example the cost (£9) to sort material from bins was reduced from more effective recycling by the public. The Director stated her thanks to the local residents, to whom the service had been called out, for their support.

In regard to the Grangemouth Flood Prevention Scheme, the Director confirmed this was a 5-10 year project linked to a phased programme of works and to funding options.

Mrs Geisler stated, following a question, that the Decriminalized Parking Enforcement (DPE) scheme was self funded, based upon income generation, and was established to break even. She also confirmed in response to a question in regard to a TIF project with West Lothian Council on joint roundabout upgrade works, that the work was ongoing and that the bulk of the funding was from Transport Scotland. The service looked to align

Transport Scotland, Falkirk Council and West Lothian Council funding to drive the project. Any works could not start until autumn of a given year. The project was ready to start when the funding was in place.

The Director stated that tests in the use of polymer bitumen road surface particles were going well. There had been a number of developments in the use of recycled plastics. The service was looking to develop a business case, following trials of the road surface at a local and national level. The committee returned to the rollout of the “burgundy bins” and sought clarification of the breakdown of the percentage of card which could be recycled from the bins. The Director stated that there was a “picking line” at the Roughmote centre to take out products which could not be recycled. It was important that residents utilized the bins correctly and again she asked the public for its support following the introduction of the new bins. She undertook to provide information on the percentage of recycled material. The Director praised the response to the Dig in Falkirk local food growing strategy. She confirmed that there had been high demand for allotments and there was an intention to expand the scheme further. The focus had been on using Council owned property but it could be developed beyond this.

The committee then considered the service performance information set out in appendix 1 to the report. Members praised the performance of the service in the reported period, however the committee sought information on the Strategic Property Review Project, which was behind target. The Director set out the work which had been carried out to date on hubs and the review of sports and leisure facilities, which had been reported to Council in June. A consultation exercise had been called for by Council and this was underway. Work was ongoing in regard to other assets of the Council’s portfolio. The review looked at Council assets and applied the agreed SPR principles. A number of recommendations would come out. Those were, Mrs Geisler stated, unsurprising. A report would be submitted to the Executive on 29 October 2019. The Director also advised that work was continuing in regard to the HQ/Arts centre project. The committee sought detail on vacant premises in Denny Town Centre. Colin Frame confirmed two units were vacant and although there had been interest there had been no material interest. It was anticipated that as the development progressed on phases 2 and 3 they would generate interest in phase 1 vacant units. The Council had engaged a marketing consultant for phase 2 of the project. In regard to indicator Econ9 (town vacancy rates) members noted an improvement with a reduction in the rate from 14.86% to 11.94%. The Director agreed and stated that Falkirk Town Centre was one of the better performing town centres. While the rate was not good, it compared favourably to rates across the country where town centres faced significant challenges. She gave a summary of work with the Falkirk town centre partnership which aimed to address vacancies and restoring vibrancy to the town centre.

The committee highlighted the LGBF indicators on regard to the percentage of roads that should be considered for roads maintenance (Env b-d). The Director stated that the Council was 23rd for class A, 20th for class B and 22nd for class C roads. Nationally Councils had the same approach to roads maintenance. The performance was not related to the Council’s approach – it related directly to funding. The investment made by Falkirk Council would

see roads continue to deteriorate. This was the case for other authorities across Scotland.

Members highlighted a decrease (86.5% in 2010-14 to 69% in 2015-18) in satisfaction with refuse collection. In 2015-18 the national average was 78.7%. The Director responded that this was based on a small sample. Nonetheless she wanted to see an improvement and work was ongoing to engage with the public to understand their dissatisfaction in order to improve the service. Mrs Geisler agreed with a statement that contamination was an issue and there was a need to continue to engage with the public to promote and understand the need to separate materials correctly.

Following a statement criticising the condition of roads in Grangemouth the Director repeated she had not stated that roads would not be 'fixed'. There was a maintenance programme but the funding required to 'fix' all roads was significant. Council had considered a report setting out the issues and costs in 2018. In response to a statement that volunteers had collected significant amounts of litter in Grangemouth the Director praised the endeavor of the volunteers and stated that while the service was not responsible for creating the vast amount of litter alluded to, their team worked hard to clear it in conjunction with the community. In response to a statement that HGV drivers littered extensively, including human waste, the Director stated that such criminality was a matter for the Police.

Following a question in regard to contaminated bins not being collected the Director advised that there was a hierarchy of response. It was important that material in blue bins was not contaminated as it affected the Council's ability to sell the waste. Not collecting contaminated bins would drive change. There was plenty of information available and officers engaged with the community. Contamination costs the Council money.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the performance of Development Services over the period 1 January to 30 June 2019.