

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 standing on its hind legs. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

Agenda Item 3

Minute

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 14 November 2019 at 9.30 am.

Councillors: David Balfour
Allyson Black
Lorna Binnie
Jim Blackwood
Niall Coleman
Dennis Goldie
John Patrick (Convener)

Officers: Kenny Gillespie, Head of Housing
Lorna Hart, Head Teacher
Stuart Irwin, Democratic Services Graduate
David Mackay, Head of Education
Robin Millard, Head of Design, Roads and Transport
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing
Laura Smith, Housing Needs Manager

S28. Apologies

An apology was intimated from Councillor Grant.

S29. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

S30. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12 September 2019 was approved.

S31. Rolling Action Log

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

Following a question in item 495 – Report of the Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Panel the Director confirmed that an update report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee on 30 January 2020.

Decision

The committee agreed to remove items 439 and 493.

S32. Order of Business

In terms of Standing Order 14.2 the convener advised of a change to the order of business. The following items have been recorded in the order they were considered at the meeting.

S33. Monitoring and Reporting on the Corporate Plan – One Council - People

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided performance information on the people priority of the Corporate Plan. Performance had traditionally been reported to the committee on a service by service basis. However in order to provide a fuller, more cohesive picture of the impacts of the Council's actions and to identify improvements it was proposed to adopt a new report format. The basis of each report would be the 3 key priorities of the Corporate Plan – People, Place and Partnership. Each of the Council's services would, as part of this new reporting framework contribute to a single report on one of the priorities – for this meeting the priority was 'people'.

The convener and members of the committee welcomed the revised report format and proposed framework. The Director acknowledged members' support and stated that the format and process would be refined and improved through time and use. Mr Ritchie acknowledged that there was a need to better reflect the way in which performance was presented.

Following a question on the work in progress in regard to Falkirk Town Centre improvements the committee discussed the performance information set out in the report. The Director assured the committee, following a question, that the format would not preclude service based performance information being scrutinised and would not be restricted solely to indicators relating to the Corporate Plan.

Following a question on action PEO.02.16 – CS17 ‘Improve Access to services for the most vulnerable in our area’ the Head of Education undertook to provide further information on proposed improvements to call handling at the contact centre.

The committee turned to action PEO.01.02 – CS17 ‘We will build capacity by engaging staff to develop to practice to raise aspiration and ambition of children and young people’. The committee acknowledged the ambition and the key role which the Community Learning and Development (CLD) Service had in delivering this action. However, members stated that as a part of the budget setting process in previous years, CLD had seen its budget cut. Members asked for confirmation of the current proposal for CLD and the likely impact of any budget reduction on the service provided by the team. The Head of Education acknowledged the work of CLD and the challenges which faced the team as the Council determined its budget for 2020/21 and beyond. Following further discussion the committee called for a report on the CLD service. In order to gauge how the service had transformed over the years the report should include detail on previous service structures and the impact of refreshes on service delivery. The Democratic Services Manager reminded the committee that later in the meeting the committee would be asked to identify potential areas for further scrutiny as part of its development of a scrutiny plan – the report which had been called for from CLD could be included in any suite of reports identified by the committee. Members agreed to this suggestion.

The committee asked questions in regard to action 02.03 – CHS17 ‘Increase Household Income’ and in particular the Council’s relationship with the Citizen’s Advice Bureaux (CAB). Specifically the committee sought clarity on whether the services provided by the CAB would be procured in future and, if so, could it be the case that the service could be provided by a different organisation. The committee asked whether in the context of a possible procurement exercise, it was considered that the CAB currently provided a satisfactory service. The Director explained that there was currently an overarching review of the Council’s arrangements with the Voluntary Sector. Previously services had been provided by means of Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Mr Ritchie explained that it was intended to place the arrangements with providers on a surer platform and this would be done by procurement. Mr Ritchie refuted a suggestion that this would cause the organisation undue stress – he stated that the Council had a good relationship with the CAB and the aim, in creating a co-ordinated family, was to achieve better governance, not squeeze services. However, in response to a direct question, the Director stated that he could not guarantee that CAB would emerge from the exercise with the contract. He did state that the Council had a long working relationship with CAB and officers were able to support colleagues through the requirements of the procurement exercise. The CAB were fully aware of what was proposed.

The committee then asked questions in regard to action 01.01 – DS17 ‘Deliver employment and training programmes to enable access to the workplace’ and specifically in regard to the reduction in the number of

Modern Apprentice (MA) places offered by the Council. The Head of Design, Roads and Transport stated that the reduction was due to the reduction in service budgets, vacancy management and the overall reduction in headcount across the Council. It was, he stated, a reflection of the reality of reduced budgets. Mr Millard also stated following a restructure following the departure of Pamela Smith he was confident that the ETU would continue to provide key support. The committee questioned whether the target of 10 for 2020/21 was realistic given the downward trend in numbers. Mr Millard undertook to look into this and to provide information to the committee on the targets and target setting process. The Head of Education added that while the MA programme provided a valuable route to employment there were other routes – for example he cited Foundation Apprenticeships. Mr Mackay undertook to provide the committee with further information. The committee also asked Mr Mackay to explain why the target for primary school exclusion rates (per 1000 people) was 10. The committee asked why the target was not 0. Mr Mackay agreed that ideally the target should be 0 but in reality some behaviours will lead to exclusion. The trend he noted was downward and the Council had one of the best rates nationally – he added that the aspiration was to keep pupils in school.

Similarly members asked why the target for the provision of free school meals was not 100%. The Head of Education stated that there was free school meals universally in p1-p3 although within this there was not a full uptake. The service worked closely with families to ensure that the availability of free school meals was known.

In regard to apprenticeships, the committee sought clarification on the differences between foundation and modern apprenticeship programmes. The Head of Education explained that foundation apprenticeships were 2 year programmes and were a mixture of taught lessons and activities which were co-designed by the schools, college and work placements. They were accredited by the SQA as level 6 and were recognised by universities as an accredited Higher. They had been successful in allowing students to test careers with some having gone into graduate apprenticeships with guaranteed jobs at the end. In regard to the number involved, the Head of Education stated that there were in excess of 400 apprenticeships across Forth Valley and undertook to provide Falkirk specific information. Mr Mackay also undertook to provide detail on the range of subjects provided. The Service was working with Skills Development Scotland to allow schools to tailor the programmes.

The committee returned to action PEO.01.02 – CS17 and sought clarification of the ambition to ‘develop our workforce learning and development plan to align with the Closer to Home strategy’. The Head of Education explained that this involved developing employees to make sure they were aware of the resources available to ensure employees were able to support the key message of the Closer to Home workstream and to ask ‘What will it take for a child, or family to remain close to home and to bring the wider family support together?’

The committee indicated that the outcomes of the Closer to Home project could be a potential area for scrutiny at a later date.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the new reporting format.

S34. Report of the Scrutiny Panel – Housing Allocations

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting the report by the Scrutiny Panel which had reviewed the Housing Allocations policy.

The Council had agreed its Scrutiny Plan for 2018 on 6 December 2017 (ref FCS7). The plan was:-

- Fly Tipping
- Anti-social behaviour
- Housing Allocation

The final review to be completed was a review of the Housing Allocations Policy. The panel had made a number of recommendations which if agreed by the committee would be sent to the Executive for consideration. If these were accepted by the Executive it would then be required to consult on the proposals. The panel had recommended that in this event, it be allowed, by the Executive, to consider the outcome of the consultation' exercise. The panel's recommendations were –

- (1) Local Letting Initiative High Flats-** To bring this policy more into line with legislation it is proposed we consult on reducing the age restriction to 50. This would assist with equality issues and enhance provision for the aging population.
- (2) Local Letting Initiative New Builds-** In order to maximise the opportunity for meeting housing needs, it is proposed to consult on removing the restrictions applied to new houses. This would mean all categories could apply in line with the quota systems. This should assist with our Rapid Re-housing Transitional Plan and moving applicants on from temporary accommodation.
- (3) Under Occupancy** - It is proposed that consultation is undertaken on aligning the application of Band 1 priority for under-occupation with overcrowding i.e. Band 1 priority applied in cases of under-occupation by 2 or more bedrooms.

It is further proposed to consult on changes to when an applicant can make an application to move when first allocated a house. It is proposed that once an application has been allocated a house they cannot apply for a move within 12 months unless there is a significant change of circumstance that changes their housing need. This means if an applicant accepts a house that is too large for their current needs, they cannot immediately then apply for a move and be priorities due to under occupancy.

- (4) Time limiting Priority (Band 1 Applicants)** - It is proposed to consult on limiting the time applicants with Band 1 and 2 priorities in Home Mover and Home Starter categories to 3 months of non bidding. This would be from the date of them being awarded the priority banding. Once an applicant had been determined as at risk of having priority removed, a housing interview will take place to review the circumstances including the availability of appropriate housing etc. Once it has been determined that priority will be removed the applicant would be moved to Band 4 in line with other Home Seekers.

It is further proposed that we consult on removing those people who are on Band 3 or 4 and who have not bid within 12 months applications. Their application would be cancelled after 12 months of no bidding activity and removed from the housing list. Their removal does not mean they will not be able to reapply but does mean that any advantage accrued due to the time they have been on the list, will be lost. It should be noted that the length of time a person has been on the list only would matter if two applicants of equal housing need apply for the same house.

- (5) Home Seeker Category Offers** - In order to minimise the time spent in temporary accommodation and the emotional impact that living in temporary accommodation has on people, we will consult on the number of offers Home Seekers are awarded before priority is removed. We propose consulting on reducing the number of offers to Home Seekers from two to one offer of housing. This can be achieved in one of two ways:

- An applicant who is actively bidding being offered a house through the choice based lettings system;
- An applicant being offered a direct match after 3 months of no bidding activity.

There will however be a review meeting to determine the reasons for non bidding e.g. lack of appropriate housing etc.

- (6) Housing Debt and Allocations** - It is proposed to amend the policy to make it clear to tenants of their obligation to address and repay their current housing debt before being made an offer of housing.

This is to ensure that those who are able to pay but refuse to pay are addressed. Applicants who are suspended from the housing list for housing debt for a 9 month period before being considered for rehousing.

- (7) Letting Quotas** - In order to fulfil obligations under the Rapid Rehousing plans, it is proposed to consult on amending the letting quotas to 50% Seeker, 25% Mover and 25% Starter. In addition any property normally considered for All Groups should be utilised for Homeless applicants as a direct match offer. The quotas will be reviewed 24 months after amendment to ensure that it is meeting the needs of our applicants.

The Director gave an overview of the panel's work program and summarised the recommendations. The convener of the panel, Councillor Blackwood thanked the members of the panel – Councillors Balfour, Coleman, Goldie and Munro and thanked those officers who had supported the panel in its work, in particular Fiona Campbell, Stuart Ritchie, Kenny Gillespie and Laura Smith.

Councillor Blackwood described discussions between members of the panel in regard to recommendation 6 and suggested that it be adjusted from 'a 9 month period' to 'a period of up to 9 months'. Members of the panel present discussed this proposal together with a further suggestion by Councillor Coleman that it be adjusted to read 'for a period of 3,6 or 9 months depending on the outcome of the public consultation, before being considered for rehousing.' Following a lengthy discussion the panel members recommended that the text be adjusted as per Councillor Coleman's proposal.

Following a question the Director confirmed that if agreed, the committee's recommendations would be considered by the Executive on 10 December 2020 and any consultation would begin in the New Year. This would last for 6 weeks.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee agreed:-

- 1) the recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel – Housing Allocations, set out in para 4.2.1- 4.2.7 in the report with an adjustment of recommendation 4.2.6 to replace 9 months with '3,6,or 9 months depending on the outcome of the public consultation';**
- 2) to refer these to the Executive for approval and further consultation; and**

- 3) to ask the Executive to allow the panel along with the portfolio holder to review the outcome of the consultation in regard to the recommendations prior to final consideration by the Executive.

S35. Progress Report – Slamannan Primary School and Early Learning Class

The committee considered an update report on Education Scotland's inspection of Slamannan Primary School and Heathrigg Nursery following a 12 month follow-up inspection in April 2019.

The committee had considered a report on the findings of an inspection of Slamannan Primary School and Heathrigg Nursery on 7 June 2018 (ref S15). The committee had asked that the Director report back following the Inspectorate's follow-up visit in April 2019.

The inspection of 2018 had identified a number of improvement areas, for example:-

- Develop more effective strategic leadership and self-evaluation approaches which lead to improved outcomes for all children across the nursery and primary school. This should include a focus on continuing to develop effective partnerships, with parents and the local community, which will enhance and support children's learning.
- Improve learning and teaching across the school, ensuring an appropriate level of pace, challenge and differentiation. Children should be given opportunities to lead their own learning and be more involved in evaluating their own progress and next steps.
- Review the approaches that support children's learning across the school. In doing this, the school needs to improve the planning of learning, teaching and assessment for children requiring additional support in their learning.
- Raise attainment for all children. Approaches to raising attainment should include making effective use of relevant data, and robust tracking and monitoring of children's progress in learning and achievement.

Mr Mackay highlighted, that in response to the initial findings:

- A strong and consistent Leadership Team had been established to extend the leadership and improvement capacity in the interim period.
- The physical integration of Heathrigg Nursery into the Slamannan School community had successfully been achieved.
- Learning and teaching continued to improve in response to the recommendations.
- The critical work around safeguarding which was identified through inspection has been timeously and appropriately activated.

- Attainment and achievement continued to progress as tracking and monitoring systems are embedded.

Following a question in regard to the findings of the initial inspection and potential implications for the pupils, the Head of Education stated that the progress made by the school, with support of the centre and Education Scotland, had had a positive impact. Mr Mackay stated that he was confident that this time next year the school would be where it would like to be. Ms Hart, in response to a question on the impact on pupil's progress stated that the school had introduced a new learning style. There had been a big change in the nursery teaching, for example, following support visits from Education Scotland and the Children's Services officers. While the outcomes had been positive so far the management team would review data and quality assurance information. Ms Hart added that where there was best practice elsewhere she and her team had been to learn and apply at the nursery where appropriate. She cited Bowhouse Nursery as an example of a nationally recognised centre of excellence.

Members of the committee commended the staff on the progress which had been made. However, members sought assurance that the monitoring systems in place at Children's Services would ensure that there could be no repeat elsewhere. The Head of Education stated that while all staff, in schools and in the Centre, worked to do their best for pupils, the focus at the time had not been where it should have been. At the Centre he now had a strong team and had introduced a development programme in addition to visiting schools as part of a validation process. In these Mr Mackay had had robust conversations with staff. Whilst these by necessity would remain confidential he felt they gave him hands on experience and added to the rigorous approach to validation which was now in place. It was important that by being visible to them schools knew that they could approach Children's Services for any help or support. The Service had improved its processes as a consequence of the inspection and the hard work done since to improve the situation.

Members of the committee sought assurance that processes were in place in secondary schools to manage the transition of the pupils into secondary education. Ms Hart confirmed that this was the case. Additionally she stated, following a question, that support needs varied from staff member to staff member and that each received support according to their individual needs.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) noted the progress which has been made, 18 months on from the initial inspection; and**

- (2) **noted that the Director of Children's Services will continue to monitor progress to meet the needs of learners at Slamannan Primary School and Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Class.**
- (3) **requested a follow up report following the next inspection in December 2020.**

The committee then adjourned for 5 minutes to allow members to take a comfort break and reconvened at 10.35 a.m. with all members present as per the sederunt.

S36. Scrutiny Plan 2020 and Committee Workplan 2020

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services requesting that the committee recommend a Scrutiny Plan for 2020 to Council and providing a workplan for 2020.

The key role of the committee was to identify and recommend topics to Council for inclusion in the Council's Scrutiny Plan. When agreed by Council the committee would establish scrutiny panels to undertake the reviews and report on the findings.

The committee had, identified 3 areas for review in 2018. These were:-

- fly tipping
- anti-social behaviour
- housing allocations

These had formed the 2018 scrutiny plan and had been completed over the course of 2018 and 2019. As part of its considerations the committee had also identified two further areas for review at a later date:-

- Pupil Equity Fund
- community involvement in the delivery of services

Additionally, Council had, in September 2019, asked the committee to consider the impact and effectiveness of its hubs as a potential area for seating.

It was proposed that the committee recommend to the Council that it agrees a Scrutiny Plan containing two subjects for review in 2020. It was further recommended that the first topic should be Pupil Equity Funding with the second slot left vacant. The topic for this would be identified by the committee during the first half of 2020 and recommended to Council in June 2020. A workplan comprising the potential topics for the '2nd slot' would be developed to manage the workload of the committee. The report set out a number of policies and strategies that had been agreed by the Executive since 2017 to assist the committee's deliberations.

Having agreed its recommendations for the 2nd slot in the first six months the committee would, post June, identify areas for inclusion in the 2020 Scrutiny Plan and report these to Council in December 2020.

Following discussion the committee members agreed to recommend that the first slot in the 2020 Scrutiny Plan should be Pupil Equity Funding.

The committee then discussed potential topics for the second slot. If agreed Services would submit reports on each topic between January and June 2020 with committee identifying the topic in June and recommending this to Council.

The topics identified by members of the committee for consideration as potential topics were:-

- Council of the Future arrangements –what are the governance arrangements, evaluate the role and effectiveness of the Board.
- Community Empowerment and Community involvement in the delivery of services – what support and guidance is offered to community groups through Community Empowerment (for example in regard to CAT of community halls), update on work in regard to coproduction of services.
- CLD - review of establishment/comparison with previous establishment: functions - what does it do, why does it do it and how has this changed over the course of recent redesigns (e.g. loss of detached youth workers).
- Bullying and racism policies in schools – implementation and management thereof.

In addition the committee indicated that future reports would be:-

- Hubs – high level report on the 2 hubs in operation with a potential review once the 3rd has been established.
- Expectations and outcomes of the Closer to Home Project.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that the committee's recommendations in regard to the Scrutiny Plan for 2020 would be reported to Council on 4 December 2019 and, if agreed, a scrutiny panel review of Pupil Equity Funding would be carried out between January and June 2020, with the second topic for review being recommended to Council in June 2020.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee:-

- (1) agreed to recommend to Council that the Scrutiny Plan for 2020 should contain two subjects for detailed scrutiny one of which will be a review of Council's approach to Pupil Equity Funding and the outcomes of Pupil Equity Funding;**

- (2) identified the following as potential areas for scrutiny to fill the vacant slot on the Scrutiny Plan with a final recommendation being made to Council in June 2020:-**
- Council of the Future arrangements – what are the governance arrangements, evaluate the role and effectiveness of the Board.**
 - Community Empowerment and Community involvement in the delivery of services – what support and guidance is offered to community groups re CE (for example in regard to CAT of community halls), update on work in regard to coproduction of services.**
 - CLD - review of establishment/comparison with previous establishment: functions - what does it do, why does it do it and how has this changed over the course of recent redesigns (eg loss of detached youth workers).**
 - Bullying and racism policies in schools – implementation and management thereof.**
- (3) noted that as part of its workplan for 2020 the committee will identify areas for inclusion on the Scrutiny Plan for 2021 at its meetings after the summer recess in 2020.**