

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.