

S6. Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2018/19

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided an update on the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) data for 2018/19. The Improvement Service published the 2018/19 Local Government Benchmarking Framework in January 2020. This report had been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Local Government Benchmarking Framework was a national approach to preparing, comparing and improving the performance of Councils in Scotland. This had replaced the previous 'Statutory Performance Indicators' required by Audit Scotland and was compiled by the Improvement Service, on behalf of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

The framework consisted of two key elements; a suite of common performance indicators and national family group events which look in depth at individual service areas.

The Director of Corporate & Housing Services reminded the Committee that the information related to 18 months ago, and that life had changed significantly since then. He suggested that that key question for the Committee should be: do we have priority services that are underperforming, and was there more information that members would want to receive on this service?

Following a question on 'Looked after children', Mr Naylor explained that the Council's Closer to Home strategy aimed to increase the number of children that were looked after in their own community (through family or kinship) and thus reduce the number of external placements. Ongoing efforts were being made to increase foster carers locally, and whilst much progress had been made over the last year, this remained a long-term project. He acknowledged that progress has stalled over the past 6 months due to the pandemic, but efforts were now beginning to recommence with vigour. In terms of recent activity, Mr Naylor confirmed that there had been an overspend in the Children and Families part of the Service budget this year; various processes were underway to reduce this as part of the wider Children's Services budget. Regarding a question on whether there had been an increase in the number of children in emergency care during the Covid-19 pandemic, Mr Naylor undertook to provide the information to members.

Following a question on town centre vacancy rates, Douglas Duff reminded members that this data was out of date, and in fact the figures for 2019/20 were worse, given the wider economic situation. He pointed out that there was variation across the Council area; for example, town centre occupation was healthy in Stenhousemuir/Larbert, whereas in Grangemouth the rate was much higher at 26%. Turning to the Council's response, a town regeneration fund, with £2M funding from the Scottish Government, had allowed the Council to move businesses to new units in Grangemouth. Following the departure of Marks and Spencer from the High Street, a Town Centre Partnership and action group had been established to find solutions.

Work was underway to progress a town centre action plan, and this would be especially important going forward as the economic impact of Covid would not be good. The repurposing of our town centres was imperative, and the role the Council could play was important; a clear example would be a new HQ and arts centre.

A question relating to local library services was raised, and Brian Pirie advised that this would be put to FCT officers at next month's meeting of the Scrutiny (External) Committee.

The committee wanted to understand why the cost of roads was approximately £900 higher than the national average. Douglas Duff explained that this was due to a number of factors; firstly, the Council's budget for roads was higher than some others, and the makeup of our network impacted on overall spending in maintenance.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report and acknowledged progress by Falkirk Council in meeting Council LGBF priorities.