

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 the water. The top-right quadrant shows a stag's head with antlers. The bottom-left quadrant shows 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 contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

Agenda Item 3

Minute

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held remotely on Thursday 8 October 2020 at 9.30 a.m.

Councillors: David Aitchison
David Balfour
Jim Blackwood (convener)
David Grant
John McLuckie
Ann Ritchie

Officers: Stuart Irwin, Graduate, Democratic Services
Jacquie McArthur, Economic Development Officer
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Pete Reid, Manager (Growth & Investment)

**Also
Attending:** Alan Imrie, Police Scotland
Alan Gibson, Police Scotland
Chris Stewart, Police Scotland

In accordance with section 43 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Convener had directed that the meeting would be conducted by video conference to allow remote attendance by elected members.

In accordance with section 50A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 the public were excluded from this meeting as it was likely that, if members of the public were present, there would be a real and substantial risk to public health due to infection or contamination with coronavirus.

SE1. Apologies

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Councillors Coleman and Nicol.

SE2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

SE3. Minute

Members asked about Falkirk Delivers BID Taxi Marshalling and Safe Base, which had been given £30k for 2020/21. Due to Covid and Lockdown resulting in the night-time economy closing down, what happened to the funding?

Pete Reid explained that much had changed since officers last attended the Committee in January. Lockdown has meant that both Falkirk BID and the Council had had to put in very specific measures to ensure that retailers and communities were safe and supported. Mr Reid explained that the funding has not been wasted or taken away, but dynamically repurposed. Moreover, this had been captured in the Council's Economic Recovery Plan.

Ms Mcarthur went on to explain in more detail what has happened since the pandemic started. The Council had worked closely with Falkirk Delivers closely during Lockdown. Since the pandemic began, the company had maintained an active role in trying to keep the town centre moving and helping users visit safely. Falkirk Delivers had applied for a Covid grant from BID Scotland and had received another £30k which topped up its Council funding. Its activities included the following:

- Supporting approx. 120 businesses in making applications for support grants.
- Supporting food banks, providing and distributing PPE, making pharmacy deliveries.
- Improving social distancing in the town centre, including installing signage and working with businesses to improve space both inside and outside to keep shoppers safe.
- Launching a welcome back campaign for shoppers.

The taxi marshals had been deployed during the day when the evening economy came to a standstill. This had been response to a high street survey where 73% of respondents had wanted greater on street support and security during the day. Since 17 July the evening economy had opened up again, and taxi marshals had returned to patrolling. Ms Mcarthur noted that the night-time economy had significantly decreased with an average of 620 patrons over a weekend compared to 2500 before Lockdown. Both the Council and Falkirk Delivers would continue to work with businesses in responding and rebuilding the local economy.

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 16 January 2020 was approved.

SE4. Police Scotland – Falkirk Area Performance

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting the latest performance report on behalf of Police Scotland.

The convener began by thanking Chief Superintendent Gibson for his regular updates to members on police performance throughout the pandemic.

In introducing the report, Chief Inspector Stewart explained that the model for local policing was much the same to that outlined in the previous report, with operational officers based in Falkirk and Grangemouth, who respond to 999 and 101 calls. There was also a strong Community Policing Team which were based out of Falkirk, Grangemouth and Larbert, which played an important role in engaging with partners and offenders. There was also a team of core officers who focused on tackling domestic abuse.

In the past 12 months, local police had taken a proactive approach in community policing, with efforts to tackle violent crime, drugs and disorder, which were of greatest harm to communities across Falkirk. Chief Inspector Stewart reported that this approach was paying dividends in the performance stats. For example, there had been a significant increase in drug activity with 82 warrants being executed – which equated to one a week. These warrants were the culmination of much intelligence work by officers and working with communities to recovery drugs and the proceeds of such dealings. Whilst enforcement was one aspect of tackling drug-related crime, police were also determined to play a role in reducing the harm of substances; as such, they have sought to build good working relationships with local drug recovery services, which included joint patrols and inviting them on some search warrants.

A major threats/challenge for local police in tackling drug trafficking was county lines. County lines is the term used by police to describe the approach taken by gangs and criminal networks from urban areas, who travel to more rural locations to sell drugs. Gangs typically used children and vulnerable people to deliver drugs to customers and this often involved deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage, and/or grooming. In December 2019, intelligence had been received of potential county lines activity in Falkirk linked to a London based Serious and Organised Crime Group. Information had been received that the offenders had taken up residence in a premises in Falkirk in what appeared to be ‘cuckolding’ scenario. Local officers had reacted swiftly to this, identifying the criminals, recovering £3,000 of drugs and apprehending the offenders who were remanded in custody. This swift intervention protected a vulnerable person and demonstrated to the group that Falkirk would be a hostile environment for them. Since this intervention, no further reports or information had been received.

Local police had also focused attention on antisocial behaviour and disorder, which could take many forms, with disputes between neighbours taking up significant time. Officers had developed innovative practices and continued to promote good partnership working; for example, a full time Police Officer was embedded in the Council's Conflict Resolution Service.

Domestic abuse continued to be a major priority for Police Scotland across the country. Recent legislation noted that domestic abuse included coercive behaviour, not simply violence. In Falkirk there was a dedicated team of officers who had one focus: tracing outstanding offenders for criminality associated with domestic abuse.

Chief Inspector Stewart gave an overview of performance data from April 2020, and how it compared to April 2019. Violent crime was down 10%, with serious assault down 12%. There had been a significant decrease (46%) in theft from housebreaking, with Covid likely to have had an impact. There was an increase in domestic abuse; whilst this could be explained away as evidence of victims having greater confidence to report crimes, and the impact of the new legislation, equally the impact of Covid and people spending more time together cannot be ignored.

Finally, Chief Inspector Stewart highlighted that the pandemic has given police significant powers around people's lives/freedoms/right. Officers were keen to engage and educate the public with partner organisations; enforcement must be a last resort. He reported that during the national lockdown there had been a very high level of compliance, with only a small minority of episodes requiring police to take action.

Chief Superintendent Gibson briefly commented on the increasing demands and strains that Police Scotland had faced over the last 6 months. From 1 March to 30 September, Police Scotland have received 1.3 million calls from the public. On one occasion, over 10k non-emergency calls were logged in a 24-hour period. Whilst greater engagement with the police is always a good thing, he used these stats to explain their decision making around how police respond to calls.

During questions, the committee asked about a 1175% increase in the number of detections for Consuming Alcohol in a designated place. This significant increase was in part due to the proactivity of officers in clamping down on such behaviour.

In response to a question on improving public satisfaction ref. updates relating to reports/complaints, Chief Superintendent Gibson explained that this is something that he was keen to resolve. During Lockdown, electronic devices had been rolled out to officers across Forth valley, including every officer in Falkirk. This allowed officers to remotely access email and make phone calls. Whilst not the whole solution, he felt this ability to operate a mobile office would help officers to engage better with communities.

The committee had asked for further information on the 46% increase in the detection rate for sexual crimes, and Chief Inspector Stewart agreed to go back to the Public Protection Unit and find out more about this statistic. In relation to a question on domestic abuse and partnership working, it was noted that during Lockdown the police had taken part in a Chief Officers Group across Forth Valley to look at this important issue and how various orgs could work together. This was an ongoing issue, and domestic abuse remained a massive priority.

It was noted by the committee that the report did not provide comparative data on how complaints against the police compared to previous years. Chief Inspector Stewart agreed to find out why this data had not been provided, and would come back to members.

The committee asked about the police's Week of Action in May 2020 to target a range of motoring offences, including speeding, driving whilst using a mobile phone and drink/drug driving. During the campaign, 95 drivers were warned and 3 fixed penalties for speeding were handed out. Why were there not more fixed penalty notices issued? Chief Inspector Stewart explained that this was most likely due to the speed at which those drivers were doing – it did not reach the threshold for further action.

Members asked about the efforts being taken to keep police officers safe from Covid, and it was noted that, just like all organisations across the country, practical measures including the use of disposable masks and social distancing were being implemented and monitored closely.

Decision

The Committee noted the report.