

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 held remotely on Thursday 12 November 2020 at 10.00 a.m.

Councillors: David Balfour
Lorna Binnie
Allyson Black
Jim Blackwood
Dennis Goldie
David Grant
Dennis Goldie
John Patrick

**Councillors Also
Attending:** Councillors Spears and Bouse

Officers: Caroline Binnie, Communication and Participation Manager
Douglas Duff, Acting Director of Development Services
Kenny Gillespie, Head of Housing and Communities
Mark Meechan, Community Learning and Development
Manager
Natalie Moore-Young, Strategy and Performance Manager
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

S8. Apologies

An apology was submitted on behalf of Councillor Coleman.

S9. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

S10. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2020 was approved.

S11. Rolling Action Log

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

Decision

The committee noted the Rolling Action Log and agreed to remove action 523 – Anti-Social Behaviour Scrutiny Review Progress Report - from the Log.

S12. The Corporate Plan 2020-2022 - Communities

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting performance information on the People - Communities priority of the Corporate Plan.

Council had agreed, on 30 September 2020, its Corporate Plan for the period 2020 to 2022. The Plan was based around three priorities – People-Communities; Place – Enterprise and Partnership – Innovation. The committee would receive reports on performance against each of the priorities.

The Communities priority focussed on:-

- Enabled Communities
- Poverty and equalities
- Education
- Social Care
- Where We Live

The report provided updates in respect of the following priorities. Subsequent reports would also include performance information:-

- Work to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of all
- Ask, listen and act on what our communities tell us
- Cut red tape to make it easier for communities to make decisions for themselves
- Build on new strengths within our communities
- Working In partnership with communities to ensure decisions and services are right for them
- Form stronger ties with our communities and partners to improve the lives of our most vulnerable

- Raise aspirations and help everyone live independent and fulfilling lives
- Ensure children and young people thrive in their education/training
- Safeguard our green spaces and maintain a transport infrastructure that is sustainable and fit for purpose
- Ensuring people feel safe within their communities and live in high quality housing

The committee noted the work of the Community Warden Team to nurture stronger communities. However, members expressed concern that a reorganisation of the team had led to a diminution of service from the Development Services warden service and that communities were no longer to call on the team for certain enforcement issues. Douglas Duff explained that the Community Safety team had been the subject of change over recent years. There had been a transfer of staff to Housing Services. However, the Service had retained a level of service despite having had to make savings. In response to a particular incident in Grangemouth Mr Duff confirmed that enforcement officers had been called out and had liaised with the police. Kenny Gillespie concurred adding that the role and responsibilities of the team had been reviewed and decisions had been taken to improve the service while achieving savings. He stated that the community safety wardens would not ignore an issue, regardless of whether it related to the Housing Account or not. However, Mr Gillespie added that he would follow up on the specific incidents raised by members.

The committee praised the work with support given to young people leaving care into their first property and sought further information. Mr Gillespie confirmed that a property, at Garry Place, had been refurbished with the aim of housing young adults leaving care. This provided an alternative to placing a young person in a property without the appropriate care available. This initiative provided support and afforded the young people the opportunity to gain life skills ahead of becoming more independent. This tied in with the ethos behind the Rapid Rehousing and Housing First initiatives. It was, he said, not about simply handing over the keys to a property - there is support from the first point of contact which allowed officers to get to know the individuals and their needs. Robert Naylor added that the property provided dedicated support and importantly a common area in which to gather. This facility helped the young people manage their first tenancy with some support and after a period, once they have developed their life skills they could move on to their own tenancy. The project had been a tremendous success so far. The Service was currently exploring whether the project could be replicated elsewhere in other locales.

The committee then discussed the priority to cut red tape and stated that it was important that communities had a single point of contact within the Council. A number of members stated that feedback from communities had suggested that they had found it difficult to connect with the Council during

the pandemic. Kenny Gillespie advised that the Executive had recently approved the Enabled Communities Plan and stated that it set out how the Council will connect with the community. It was important he agreed that lessons are learned from engagement during the pandemic – as an example of this the Council intended to work with the third sector to reach those with quiet voices within the community. The power of the communities was particularly evident during the pandemic. The work of the third sector in the area had recently been praised by the Cabinet Secretary on a visit to the area. Nonetheless the Council wanted to follow up and talk to communities who had felt neglected. In regard to identifying single points of contact Mr Gillespie agreed that it was important for these to be in place and communicated to the community. This was a cornerstone of the OneCouncil approach.

The committee then discussed the forthcoming switch of the MECS service from analogue to digital. It was suggested that had the switch happened sooner the result would have been more benefit to the vulnerable in the community during lockdown but nevertheless the project was welcomed. Members sought confirmation that the service would be appropriately resourced and asked how its effectiveness would be measured. Kenny Gillespie undertook to provide this information after the meeting.

The committee considered the work of the community during the pandemic. It was suggested that some organisations had experienced difficulties when dealing with the Council – citing for example issues in regard to food supply and accessing funding. It was suggested that all members would be likely to be aware of local issues and there would be benefit in holding an all councillor meeting to share experiences and to build on the very apparent strengths that had been demonstrated and to learn from negative experiences. Members of the committee agreed that they had all seen examples where communities had pulled together not only to provide food but also to look after the vulnerable within their own areas. There was, it was suggested, a real issue around mental wellbeing. Kenny Gillespie agreed that this was the case and pointed to the Falkirk Plan, which was currently being developed, which would look to address issues of mental wellbeing. He also advised that he recognised the concerns of members in regard to communication with community groups that were supporting their communities through the pandemic and the Council and advised the committee that there was a regular meeting of partnerships and agencies which looked at precisely the kinds of issues raised by member today. He undertook to feedback the specific concerns raised at today's meeting, in particular those around the Kersiebank Food project. Members of the committee noted this and stressed that it must be a key priority of the Council to support communities through the pandemic. Mental health was a key issue in particular in regard to senior citizens. As the pandemic continues more and more people were feeling increasingly isolated. It was important to ensure that positives were built upon and negative aspects were learned from.

Mark Meechan reiterated that the weekly meetings were designed to do exactly this. Members repeated that mental wellbeing was a key priority, as was community safety. On this it was suggested that officers should look again at the community safety function. Douglas Duff acknowledged members' concerns and repeated that the change in the service was as a consequence of savings that his Service had to make. His officers were focussed on environmental issues such as flytipping but they did connect with colleagues in the Housing service.

The committee then turned to active travel and stated that it was important that the appropriate cycle route infrastructure was in place and maintained, citing as an example the Bo'ness to Grangemouth cycle route. Mr Duff responded that the Service was in the process of bolstering the cycle routes through a number of external funding sources and was keen to promote active travel.

The issue of housing repairs was discussed. In response to a statement that the communication between the various teams within Housing could be improved, Kenny Gillespie stated that there was joined up working within the service. In regard to a specific example in Grangemouth Mr Gillespie stated that the community wardens should target issues and this awareness should be complemented by the housing officers who were walking their areas and who should now be catching up on repairs issues now that they were able to carry out their walkabouts. If members had any concerns about security they should, he advised, immediately raise their concerns through the appropriate channels. In regard to the general issue of housing repairs, Mr Gillespie advised that the Head of Service was currently leading a redesign of housing repairs in order to ensure the Council's approach was fit for purpose and streamlined, having learned from the approach taken during the pandemic.

Kenny Gillespie confirmed that staff dementia awareness raising sessions had been led by Age Scotland.

The committee praised the Go Youth Trust work during the pandemic, highlighting the fact that the organisation had pivoted from its programmes and activities which had been cancelled due to lockdown to deliver an alternative programme to support young people in the area, in conjunction with Children's Services staff, by providing 'Boredom Packs' and 'Parent SOS vouchers'. Mark Meechan agreed stating that the organisation had been forced to move from face to face work to online interactions. During the period there hadn't been a decrease in the number of people accessing the service. He noted however that recently there had been a decrease due to 'digital fatigue'. The organisation had, as a consequence, responded again and had introduced short walks etc. Children's Services had engaged Go Youth Trust to work in secondary schools to identify those families which would most benefit from their support and work with them to codesign to the interaction that best suits their needs.

The committee turned to the eviction panels that had been set up as part of the process to develop prevention strategies to keep children and young people in their homes. Members asked whether it was the case that RSLs and private landlords could simply evict people and leave them homeless. Kenny Gillespie advised that RSLs and private landlords had to follow due process so they were legal processes - evictions couldn't 'just happen'. Normally there would be months of discussions to look at interventions or support. He also added that evictions weren't always 'behaviour' related – landlords could for example be looking to sell their property.

Following a question Douglas Duff undertook to provide members with information on the number of enforcement officers within his Service. Kenny Gillespie advised that he had 6 officers.

Following a further question Mr Duff confirmed that external funding had been applied for from agencies such as Sustrans and the Scottish Government.

Following a question on the Housing Allocations Policy, Kenny Gillespie advised that the Policy had been implemented in October and as such it was too early to gather evidence on its implementation. However it would be monitored and reviewed.

Following further statements from members in regard to addressing the mental health and wellbeing needs of tenants and to the allocation of properties to people with health needs. Kenny Gillespie stated that this was the aim of the Housing First and of Rapid Rehousing. The key is early intervention and cases are discussed at cross service case meetings. While it was possible to set up 'special lets' Mr Gillespie reminded the committee that the Council operated a choice based letting system.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

S13. Antisocial Behaviour Scrutiny Update Report

The committee considered a 6 month update report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services on the progress made in implementing the recommendations from a scrutiny panel review of Antisocial behaviour.

As part of the Scrutiny Plan the committee had established a Scrutiny Panel in 2018 to undertake a review of the anti-social behaviour. The panel had reported to the Committee on 4 April 2019. The committee had agreed the panel recommendations and requested a 6 month update on progress. This was provided to the committee on 30 January 2020. Of the 6 action points arising from the review 2 remained to be implemented. The committee had asked for a further report in 6 months.

The report provided an update on the two actions. These were:

Review of Support Services

Services should review the support offered to victims of antisocial behaviour, whether the victim be directly or indirectly affected by antisocial behaviour or whether the victim be the recipient of vexatious antisocial behaviour complaints against them;

Guidance for Councillors

Guidance should be provided for Councillors to assist in dealing with complaints relating to antisocial behaviour, including best practice regarding mediation, mental health training and how to have challenging conversations. The Council also recognises the role of local members in issues relating to antisocial behaviour as legitimate advocates on behalf of constituents. The Council must recognise the role of the elected member and the expectations on the elected member of the general public.

Both actions had now been implemented.

Following a question about the sample size in the survey Natalie Moore-Young advised that the survey had been carried out as part of the case closing conference which was offered at the end of each case closure. Of the 30 offered an opportunity to feedback 25 agreed to participate. In this way the survey was targeted. There were however ongoing discussions with individual service users where the service responds to individual needs.

Following a question Ms Moore-Young stated that on average mediation cases could take 4-6 weeks to resolve. There was a success rate of approx. 90% - the challenge was when people did not want to participate and simply wanted a quick fix.

The committee then considered the allocations system with reference being made to a specific situation. Kenny Gillespie stated that the Council operated a transparent choice based letting system and worked with partner agencies and applicants to address issues at the earliest opportunity. He described the multi-agency approach and the support measures which were in place. The pandemic had brought additional issues or had enhanced issues which were already in place. Mental health and wellbeing were key concerns for the Service. Members stated that it was important that staff were looked after in such challenging times and sought assurance that their mental wellbeing was being looked out for. Natalie Moore-Young confirmed that staff wellbeing was a priority and the service had responded to the situation by providing additional training to help staff respond to mental health concerns of others and their own wellbeing. This training would be rolled out to all frontline staff. Members were encouraged to hear this and advised they may too benefit from training, Ms Moore-Young advised she would pass the training details on. FDAMH and Age Concern. She also confirmed that some of the training could be rolled out to members. In

regard to mental health, members sought clarity on the %age of instances of Antisocial behaviour in which mental health was a factor. Ms Moore-Young stated that in all cases it was important to understand the underlying issues and mental health can often be a factor. She undertook to provide members with detail of service standards following a question on the time taken to resolve cases.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.

The committee then adjourned for a short break at 11.40 a.m. and reconvened at 11.50 a.m. with all members present as per the sederunt.

S14. Complaints Annual Report 2019/20

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting the Council's Complaints Annual Report for 2019/20.

The Complaints Annual Report set out the Council's performance against 8 indicators set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. They were:-

- Complaints received per 1,000 population
- Number of complaints closed
- Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
- Average response times
- Performance against timescales
- Number of cases where an extension is authorised
- Customer satisfaction
- Learning from complaints

Over the period, the Council had received 4979 complaints compared to 3670 in the previous year. This represented an increase from 22.9 per 1000 population to 30.9 per 1000.

Of these, 91% had been closed at stage 1 of the Complaints Handling Process.

In regard to performance against timescale, 89% of stage 1 complaints had been closed within the 5 day deadline and 63% of stage 2 complaints had been closed within the 20 day deadline (compared to 58% in 2018/2019 and 69% in 2017/18).

43% of complaints had been upheld or partially upheld at stage 1 with 49% upheld or partially upheld at stage 2 (compared to 51% and 49% respectively in 2018/19). There had been a significant increase in the number of complaints referred to the SPSO for resolution, from 22 in 2018/19 to 43 in 2019/20. However only 1 had been investigated by the SPSO and it was not upheld and there were no recommendations.

In 2019/20 the areas of service which had received the most complaints had been:-

Stage 1 Complaints

	Totals
Household waste collection	984
Housing repairs	980
Staff conduct	521
Other	173
Recycling advice	171
Household waste assisted collection	118
Local schools	109
Tenant support	109
Council tax account enquiries	104
Bulky household waste collection	59

Stage 2 Complaints

	Totals
Housing repairs	78
Household waste collection	57
Staff conduct	56
Local schools	30
Communal housing repairs	20
Household waste assisted collection	15
Housing nuisance	15
Recycling advice	11
Tenant support	10
Other	9

The committee welcomed the report. Members suggested that it would be helpful if future reports would include background information for context. For example, Kenny Gillespie confirmed that there had been approximately 50,000 housing repairs carried out in 2019/20. The 521 complaints equated to 2.2% of this. Members suggested this was still a high number of complaints. While Mr Gillespie agreed that it was, he also stated that the service aimed to have no complaints.

Members of the committee noted that complaints about the contact centre had featured in the top 10 complaints. Customers had previously, it was suggested, experienced difficulties getting through to the Council. While the new system had improved access, members suggested that once connected, the system was convoluted and left callers holding on while contact centre staff tried to connect them. Kenny Gillespie undertook to relay members comments to the Head of Service.

The committee then considered the 521 complaints against staff. The committee asked if information was available in regard to the nature of the complaints and whether the Council interrogated these complaints to learn lessons. Caroline Binnie stated that the information available was high level - the Council didn't collect the information behind this. The complaints were generally about conduct and interpersonal matters where for example a caller hadn't liked the way in which they were spoken to or the tone used. Or they didn't accept the answer given. The committee asked if the complaints had led to disciplinary measures. Ms Binnie stated that due to the nature of the complaints they normally did not.

The committee then asked if support and learning measures were put in place to support staff as a consequence of the complaints. Ms Binnie stated that the Complaints Officers' Working Group met twice a year to learn and share lessons from the complaints received. She undertook to take the committee's comments back to the group.

Following a question on the makeup of the 173 'other' complaints Caroline Binnie stated that this was defined in the SPSO complaints standards and there was a large variation in the nature of complaints within this category and undertook to provide examples to members.

Decision

The Scrutiny Committee noted the report.