

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 city skyline with a diagonal beam of light. The top-right quadrant depicts a stag's head with antlers. The bottom-left quadrant shows a three-masted sailing ship on wavy water. The bottom-right quadrant features a grizzly bear standing on a rocky outcrop. 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 25 November 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

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

Councillors in attendance: Laura Murtagh, Portfolio Holder for Public Protection

Officers: Sally Buchanan, Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator
Sophie Dick, Democratic Services Graduate
Kerry Drinnan, Service Manager
Laura Hadley-Stove, Service Manager
Lesley James, Senior Service Manager
Sharon Laing, Service Manager
Gayle McIntyre, Service Manager of Children's Services
Ewan McWilliams, Members Services Co-ordinator
Mark Meechan, Community Learning & Development Manager
Cath Megarry, Service Manager
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
George Paul, Corporate & Housing Team Leader
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

Also Attending: Lynne Gow, Station Commander, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
David Sharp, Local Senior Officer for Falkirk & West Lothian, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

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.

SE16. Apologies

No apologies were intimated.

SE17. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Blackwood declared a non-financial interest in item SE 22 due to his attendance, as an observer, at management meetings of the Denny Citizen Advice Bureau board, but considered that this did not require him to recuse himself from consideration of the item.

SE18. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 7 October 2021 was approved.

SE19. Sacro Youth Justice Service

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which focused on the Sacro Youth Justice Services which had been presented to the committee on 7 October 2021.

The committee requested a further report from the Director of Children's Services which provided benchmarking information about services provided by Sacro elsewhere in Scotland and information on how Sacro was funded. Additionally, as requested, this report provided information on previous years' funding and targets as well as future service options.

The committee recognised that Youth Teams had provisions to work with children who showed behavioural problems and schools had integrated counsellors to deal with social problems. It asked how Sacro provided a different service to young people. The Service Manager of Children's Services explained that Sacro provided a range of family support, but offered specialist help in the Youth Justice System particularly in relation to intervention in offending. Sacro had access to Structured Risk Assessment Tools which helped the young person in understanding the support that they required. Trained staff also had experience in Restorative Justice Approaches.

In terms of the £73,368 funding from the Council, members asked how much of this was utilised for employee salary as it was suggested money could be saved by providing the help internally. Ms McIntyre stated that in previous years there were more youth justice provisions within Children's Services, however, the salary and qualifications of staff were greater than Sacro thus currently spending less. The outreach Sacro could provide was significant

and since the easing of lockdown restrictions, discussions had begun with group work for young people within schools and included Community Police Officers.

Discussions were held to increase the number of young people receiving a Sacro service from 50 to at least 80 in 2021/22, members sought more information on how this would be achieved. The Service Manager clarified that there had been ongoing reviews and evaluations of current work in the hopes of freeing up capacity in services. The criteria of help provided had been expanded to include Higher Risk Young People and court support for those over 16.

Members then asked if the current funding allocation of £73,368 would be sufficient for helping 80 young people to which Ms McIntyre stated it was expected to. Sacro would utilise the funding to target those who needed it most and provide time-limited early intervention. The Council had provided limited administrative help to Sacro in relation to their early intervention groups.

Throughout 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2021, the disparity of gender in those who receive a Sacro service had remained roughly the same; from 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021, Sacro received 53 referrals, 7 females and 46 males. The Service Manager explained national statistics would unveil young males were more likely to participate in offending and anti-social behaviour which was reflected in the work of Sacro. In terms of the service provided, it was adequate for both males and females – the work undertaken for each individual was tailored for their personal needs, risk and offences.

Ms McIntyre explained that in areas which had experienced spikes of disorder, a targeted approach would be adopted. Sacro had been involved with Community Learning and Development in terms of community outreach and identifying individuals. This work was extended to the Community Safety Team to understand the reasons behind individual's behaviour.

The committee asked if it would be appropriate for referrals to be made at an earlier stage of an individual's behaviour to which the Service Manager explained the Early and Effective Intervention group was in place to allow Police Scotland to refer an individual, even if it was their first instance, and Sacro would respond quickly.

In terms of how effective the service was at mitigating reoffending, Ms McIntyre was unable to provide specific data at the meeting but would include it in future reports. When evaluating, Sacro compared wellbeing scores (which took into consideration all aspects on an individual's life) from prior and post intervention. Young people's feedback highlighted that they felt more confident and actively avoided negative behaviour.

Members sought for more information on how the approach to mitigate reoffending differed, the Service Manager explained that the inclusion of Higher Risk Young People and the employment of 1 full-time Youth Justice

Service Worker brought forward more experience and better trained staff. They would provide more intensive work over a longer period of time with a different focus, more on underlying behavioural issues, the recognition of substance use or mental health or wellbeing issues.

The Service Manager provided more information on what was entailed during court support – if a young person was not subject to a supervision order and committed an offence, they could be requested to appear in court, thus entering the Adult Justice System. Sacro would quickly become involved to identify needs of the individual and their family and source legal assistance if required as well establish a Risk Management Safety Plan.

Decision

The Committee noted the additional information requested regarding Sacro's service delivery nationally and locally.

SE20. Performance Report: Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which presented the local performance report of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

In terms of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 local senior officers were required to report on performance in regard to the Local Fire and Rescue Plan, and to report on the provision of local services.

The following performance information was appended to the report:-

Local Plan Performance 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2021. David Sharp gave a short summary of the key areas of performance over the period which had covered the lockdown period.

SFRS Community Safety Advocates/Community Firefighters and Operational Firefighters delivered an educational programme within schools to address any developing trends and members asked how schools were chosen to participate. The Local Senior Officer for Falkirk and West Lothian explained that if particular areas had spikes in criminal behaviour, the SFRS targeted this area in partnership with schools. The Station Commander also explained that schools which were cause of concern were targeted - this was unveiled through intelligence-led data provided through their partnerships such as Police Scotland. She stated that wider educational facilities were available to all schools which had been relied upon throughout Covid-19 restrictions. 1-2-1 programmes were offered to those who presented as High Risk which was maintained throughout the pandemic.

The committee referred to the requirement for homes to have interlinked Smoke and Heat alarms from February 2022 and that the Scottish Government had provided the SFRS access to a limited number of detectors

to enable support for the most vulnerable in communities. Mr Sharp explained that work to identify those who were vulnerable had begun and was ongoing – the SFRS's Home Fire Safety Visits as well as referrals were in place to identify.

Members noted that the Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest pilot was paused, they asked for an update on this. The Local Senior Officer for Falkirk and West Lothian referred to an offer by the Chief Fire Officer in late 2020 to the Fire Brigade Union, which covered Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest but was later rejected. He assured that the SFRS continued to assist partner agencies where and when needed, although did not hold the capacity to do this work independently.

The committee sought for assurance that the SFRS received support from Police Scotland in tackling Deliberate Fires to which Mr Sharp clarified that the SFRS worked closely with Police Scotland – this was done through regular updates and partner referrals. Police Scotland utilised the information provided to identify offenders and the schools they attended with the purpose to improve SFRS's education programme

Following a question on actions that could have minimised the issue of wheelie bin fires, the Local Senior Officer for Falkirk and West Lothian explained that when carrying out Home Fire Safety Visits and other community work, reminders were given to the public to place their bins for collection a short-time period before collection and return them to their house shortly after. He explained it was the materials within the bins that were set alight therefore it not being necessary to change the material in which the bin was made from. Mr Sharp recognised the increase of deliberate fires following the easing of lockdown restriction which was anticipated to be an act of frustration from youths.

In terms of vehicle fires, members sought clarity on how many were deliberate to which Mr Sharp clarified for the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September 2021, there were none and explained that the majority of deliberates attended were involving woodlands, grasslands, forests, crops and sheds.

Members referred to historic media concerns regarding the attacks that Fire Fighters endure when carrying out their jobs and asked if this was still prevalent. The Local Senior Officer for Falkirk and West Lothian explained that in the Bonfire period during 2020 and 2021 there had been a reduction – he suggested that this was due to the educational work with Police Scotland in informing school children the helpful role of Fire Fighters. He confirmed there were 0 physical attacks and 1 case of verbal abuse on Bonfire Night 2021.

The committee then referred back to the legislative change in February 2022 with the implementation of interlinked Smoke and Heat alarms and asked how those who were not being assisted through the Scottish Government funding delegated to the SFRS would be regulated. Mr Sharp explained that

the onus would be on the occupier/owner of the property to conform to legislation. He stated that by not conforming with new legislation, house insurance would become invalid if an incident occurred and the house does not meet regulation standards. The SFRS would continue to carry out Home Fire Safety Visits and risk assessments – they were implementing Single Point Fire Alarms at the time as a stop gap until February 2022 for those who did not have working alarms.

Members noted local cases where Gas Alarms were identified in areas which did not have gas and the Local Senior Officer explained smoke alarms should have been fitted within hallways and living rooms whereas heat alarms in kitchens. Furthermore, Carbon Monoxide detectors had to be fitted for any Carbon fuelled devices – the use of Gas Alarms was not limited to gas, but could facilitate heating boilers and coal fires.

Decision

The Committee considered the performance of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and approved the report and acknowledge progress by the organisation in meeting its priorities.

SE21. Following The Public Pound: Services To Children and Young People – 2020/21 Annual Reporting Statements

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update regarding the work of the external organisations that receive funding, provide services to children and young people, and fall within the Following the Public Pound reporting and monitoring arrangements. The reporting period is April 2020 to March 2021.

Funding was provided by Children's Services to external organisations to provide services which could not readily be provided by the Council. As part of the Following the Public Pound arrangements, reporting statements were prepared by the relevant monitoring officer for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee (External).

Organisation	2019/20	2020/21	Appendix
Aberlour Early Years Outreach	£159,060	£159,063	1
Aberlour Family Support Centre Langlees	£110,937	£110,937	2
Barnardo's	£500,000	£500,000	3
Home-Start Falkirk West	£28,014	£28,014	4
NHS Forth Valley CAMHS	£33,100	£78,500	5

Clinical Psychologist for Looked After Children			
NHS Forth Valley Speech & Language Therapy	£465,040	£515,040	6
One Parent Families Scotland Falkirk	£82,523	£82,523	7
Quarriers Children's Rights Service	£86,200	£86,200	8
Transform Forth Valley Time For Us	£38,870	£38,870	9
"Who Cares?" Scotland Advocacy Service	£27,970	£27,960	10
TOTAL	£1,531,714	£1,627,114	

Robert Naylor gave an overview of the report. The committee then considered the monitoring officers' reports.

The committee first considered Aberlour Early Years Outreach and sought clarification on what was meant by 'Families outwith the catchment area where an alternative support could not be sourced'. Cathy Megarry explained all areas of Falkirk were covered through the contracted family support providers where they provide the majority of their support locally. However, in cases where specialist assistance was required and their local provider could not help, they would be given help from another area. She stated that a 'Postcode Lottery' would not exist with this approach, however, evidence would support that individuals prefer their local providers.

Following a question on how families were identified, the Service Manager clarified it was through Social Work referrals as well as health and education colleagues. Multi-agency meetings also took place which would lead to a referral to the most appropriate agency.

In terms of concerns being raised by local residents regarding a child's welfare and then knowing which agency to contact, Ms Megarry stated that an inhouse service was provided, 'Initial Response Team', who dealt with reports provided by the public. This programme was a One-Stop-Shop service for all child protection and welfare concerns which provided a quick response.

The Service Manager explained that the pandemic had significant impact on families who had pre-existing issues. This impact was also mirrored on service delivery; much of the service had to be paused due to restrictions but Aberlour employees managed to source suitable IT equipment and found other ways to engage with families such as garden visits. Furthermore, Falkirk Families Support Line was established to provide a response to difficulties experienced by families due to Covid-19 restrictions – due to services moving online, this service was no longer running. She stated that the impact that

Covid-19 had on families was difficult to quantify but expected to remain for a long time.

Members then focussed on Appendix 2 and asked why Aberlour had a specific facility in Langlees. The Service Manager explained that Langlees had historically been deemed an area of high priority for family support – it covered Langless, Bainsford and New Carron principally, however, was open to service to all areas of Falkirk if needed.

The service was expected to support 45 families, however, 77 were supported and the committee asked how this was possible. Cathy Megarry explained that 45 was the target set out in the Joint Working Agreement and Aberlour had managed to exceed this through new flexible working methods. She stated that some families had provided positive feedback on working remotely whereas others still required face-to-face contact.

Following on, members asked for clarification on what was meant by 'VIG' in relation to Home-Start Falkirk. Laura Hardley-Stove explained it was an abbreviation for Video Interactive Guidance. It was an intervention that could work alongside families to show visuals of positive behaviours and areas of improvement, it could also be utilised as a measurement of improvement.

The committee noted that CAHMS did not provide a specialist service for Looked After Children and asked why this was. Gayle McIntyre explained that due to this group having the highest levels of needs, they required a specialist service that could respond quickly and flexibly thus different to CAHMS. CAHMS had a referral criteria as well as a long waiting list – if young people did not attend appointments they were often removed from the service entirely which could be troublesome for those in care.

Members raised concern over the long waiting list which had been a barrier to referrals for those in need. Furthermore, they highlighted the difficulty in liaison with GPs and school counsellors due to the requirement for pupil's permission.

In the reporting period, 112 young people worked with the psychologist which was an increase of 43 from the year prior, the committee sought information on the capacity of the service and the impact this increase had. The Service Manager explained the year prior experienced minimal staffing numbers (0.5 psychologists for the year) hence the lower number. Due to the recruitment of 1 full-time psychologist, service had picked up. Furthermore, the pandemic demanded a change in service providing, such as online consultations, allowing more free time for professionals. In terms of the waiting list, there was not one at present allowing psychologists to be responsive. She stated that the numbers of those working with the psychologist was high when recognising there was only 1 full-time clinical psychologist employed in the service.

The committee wished to know how successful video consultations had been to which the Service Manager stated CAHMS carried out 102 face-to-face consultations throughout the pandemic – the decision to carry the consultation online or in person was dependent on the individuals needs. She recognised that in-person consultations would be preferable, however, the demand of the pandemic had required the service to adapt and proven to be moderately successful. Engagement had slightly decreased although the service had been consistent.

In terms of the funding for NHS Forth Valley Speech and Language Therapy, the business year of 2020/21 saw 57% of funding from NHS and 43% from the Council. The committee asked how this balance was decided upon. Kerry-Anne Drinnan clarified that it was jointly funded due language barriers existing most prominently in schools therefore the necessity to upskill school staff. The Service Manager explained that it was usually split 55%-45%, however, the change was reflective of the change in service being provided within schools and no longer clinics. This model was more efficient as the removal of NHS funding would require the Council to establish a bespoke service and recruit specialists which the NHS already had.

Members sought clarity on the difference between education staff requests for assistance and self-requests as education staff often encouraged parents to self-request. Ms Drinnan stated that the model used to be solely based upon parental requests with minimal intervention of schools as they were unable to discuss an individual case. The model had adapted to allow parents and schools to work together to provide help for the child, however, parental permission to make an educational request remained therefore some parents make the request themselves.

The committee then considered Time 4 Us which had experienced 92% attendance in appointments in the period April 2020 – March 2021, however it asked for clarity as to what happened with the other 8%. Lesley James confirmed that 8% had failed to show to their appointment – Time 4 Us undertook a blended approach to the service for families, however, the approach taken was dependent on the needs of the family. The Senior Service Manager stated the reasonableness of 92% attendance taken into consideration the ongoing pandemic.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the external providers in meeting the Council's priorities.

SE22. Following the Public Pound – Poverty and Equalities

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided information under the Following the Public Pound arrangements for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the Council's outcome to make our area a fairer and more equal place to live.

Funding was provided to 4 external organisations to provide services which could not readily be provided by the Council. As part of the Following the Public Pound arrangements, reporting statements were prepared by the relevant monitoring officer for consideration by the committee.

The organisations funded or monitored by the Council that support this outcome include:

Organisation	Monitoring Service	2020/21 Funding
LGBT Youth Scotland	Children's Services	£29,750
Citizen's Advice Bureaux Grangemouth & Bo'ness, Denny & Dunipace, Falkirk	Corporate and Housing Services	£337,664
MacMillan Money Matters	Corporate and Housing Services	£38,000
Armed Forces Project - Denny CAB	Corporate and Housing Services	£18,000

Sally Buchanan gave an overview of the report, highlighting that the reporting period was the financial year 2020/21.

The committee first considered LGBT Youth Scotland who had the agreed outcome to 'Provide a range of positive opportunities for LGBT young people by providing youth groups and opportunities to gain accreditation'. It asked what was meant by accreditation. Mark Meechan explained it related to awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Youth Achievement Awards and Solitaire Awards all of which were carried out on a voluntary basis. The staff of LGBT Youth Scotland were in place to support young people to participate.

Following a question regarding how long the Council had funded LGBT Youth Scotland, the Community Learning & Development Manager clarified funding began in 2016/17, however, 2020 was the first year it was agreed at Council to fund on an annual basis rather than 3-yearly.

The Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator clarified to committee that the disparity between busyness and the number of issues identified within the Citizens Advice Bureaux between Denny & Dunipace, Falkirk and Grangemouth & Bo'ness was complex. Falkirk was traditionally the busiest hub, however, Grangemouth & Bo'ness identified more issues which could be reflective of the different working practices or the needs of those who came in. Ms Buchanan referred to the added complexity that Covid-19 had brought when analysing figures, however, despite restrictions directly impacting on service, the Citizen's Advice Bureaux adapted to remain open. The bureaux had reopened, however, triage services were in place to limit face-to-face consultations to those who could not be supported in any other way.

Denny & Dunipace had recruited 8 new volunteers in 2020/21, in the same period Falkirk and Grangemouth & Bo'ness had not recruited any. The committee wanted to know what method of recruitment Denny & Dunipace Citizen's Advice Bureaux had used to achieve this. The Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator suggested it could be caused by campaigns, actively looking to recruit due to turnover or another impact of the pandemic. Ms Buchanan agreed to come back to committee with more information and assured committee that good practice, such as recruitment, was already being shared between the 3 bureaux.

Members referred to the Citizen's Advice Bureaux's historical partnership with From Me To You and wanted to know if any other partnerships were ongoing. Ms Buchanan explained that prior to the pandemic, all 3 bureaux carried out outreach work but had been curtailed due to restrictions. She stated that now was the correct time to reopen these services and reintroduce in-person discussions. The Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator assured committee she would raise discussion on the progress of outreach work at the Joint Working Meeting the following week.

In 2020/21, 10 additional locations were covered on an outreach basis covering a significant proportion of the Council area and members asked how this was carried out. Ms Buchanan suggested it may have been through a contact referral rather than a referral on premises, however, would refer back to committee with more information.

By the end of 2020, £2,602,502.72 additional benefits were received by clients in the Falkirk area due to the work from the 3 bureaux – this was £5,199,895.13 in the previous year. The reason for the reduction was partially due to face-to-face tribunals stopping causing a back log in appeal hearings and therefore delaying any financial gain from successful outcomes. The committee asked what impact this had on claimants. George Paul clarified that tribunals adapted to video-calls which began to tackle the back log and face-to-face tribunals had begun. Those awaiting tribunal would continue to receive benefits and the Scottish Welfare Fund could be utilised.

The committee noted that Forth Valley Macmillan Money Matters Project had exceeded their target to support 400 people as they achieved 450 and asked if there was any more capacity. The Corporate & Housing Team Leader explained that the majority of those engaging with the service were on a DS1500. One impact of the pandemic had been a lateness in diagnosis of cancer and consequently, a higher rate of terminal cases. Furthermore, certificates issued by GPs had led to a reduction in administrative work for those part of Macmillan Money Matters therefore an increase in allocating money.

The Corporate & Housing Team Leader clarified that, as of yet, no individual had been turned away from the service. Mr Paul explained that Stirling Council had been successful at raising additional funds as well as additional staff members within hospitals providing help, thus reducing pressure on Macmillan Money Matters.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the external organisation in meeting Council priorities.