

## **S27. The Corporate Plan 2020-2022 – Enterprise**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting performance information on the Enterprise priority.

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 Enterprise priority focussed on:-

- Supporting local businesses and town centres;
- Helping people gain skills and employment, and
- Enabling our area to reduce its carbon emissions.

The report included:-

- Appendix 1 – a summary dashboard of current overall performance for Enterprise.
- Appendix 2 – a update on progress of the Enterprise Corporate Plan actions.
- Appendix 3 – the Council of the Future dashboard.
- Appendix 4 – the Enterprise performance indicators.
- Appendix 5 – the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators.

The committee referred to Stage 1 funding bid which had been submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for c£1.6m Climate FORTH project. It asked what plans were in place if the bid was unsuccessful. The Acting Director of Development Services explained this and the Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy for the Forth Valley reflected the development of regional planning policy into physical plans and economic partnerships, which would influence the availability of external funding. If the bid was unsuccessful, they would start searching for alternative external funding which aides this type of project.

Members then focussed on the commercial property vacancies, which had reduced by 5 significant lettings, and questioned what impact this had. Mr Duff noted that there was pressure on the portfolio, particularly for storage space due to the pandemic. The Acting Director of Economic Development clarified that the 5 lettings mentioned were situated in Westmains Industrial Estate and explained that the demand for storage space minimised vacant space and rates paid by the Council whilst accruing rental income. Mr Reid stated he would refer back to committee with more detail on the 5 significant lettings.

Bereavement Services managed increased service demands caused by Covid-19 and committee wished to know the increase as a %. The Acting

Director of Development Services stated this information was not available in % figures, however, noted that the number of Covid-related deaths in Falkirk as of 10 November 2021 sat at 292. This increase had placed significant pressure on the Bereavement Service which was furthered by the demand of adjoining councils for the use of our service.

The committee sought for an update on the development of a landing page which would advertise local businesses once an individual had joined the free town-centre Wi-Fi. Mr Reid clarified that this was under construction – he identified that the landing page could be utilised to promote Council services as well. The page had been implemented in Falkirk town centre and underway for the district centres as well.

In terms of the introduction of tablet devices within the Roads, Grounds, Street Cleansing and Street Lighting workforce, committee asked what impact it had had on performance. Mr Duff explained that the intention was to improve performance, however, indicated that a report presented to committee later in the meeting would answer this question in fuller depth.

In regard to LGBF Indicator SECON7 – ‘Proportion of people earning less than the living wage’, members highlighted the decline (18.9% in 2018/19 reduced to 15.2% in 2019/20), it was questioned if this could be reduced to 0% and what sectors were adopting the living wage. The Acting Director of Development Services clarified that the indicators reflected the health of the economy and were nationally monitored; therefore, onus was placed upon employers to pay the living wage rather than Council interference. In terms of direct action from the Council, the effect on business owners would be limited other than drawing to the employer’s attention the importance of adopting the living wage. The Acting Head of Economic Development continued that monitoring this area was ongoing in the Employment Training Unit.

Members then focussed on LGBF Indicator SECON9 – ‘Town Vacancy Rates’ and asked when updated statistics would be presented to committee as last reported in 2019/20 at 14.38%. Mr Duff explained that the Planning Team were undertaking regular town centre health checks and had recently completed the work for the 2020/21 data. The information drawn together would breakdown vacancy rates by primary and secondary locations – in overall terms, it showed that there had been an increase in vacancy. Including the Central Retail Park, the vacancy unit % sat at 17.5% whilst being 17.9% excluding the Central Retail Park for 2021, therefore a significant increase.

The committee noted LGBF Indicator SECON1 – ‘% Unemployed People Assisted into work from Council operated/funded Employability Programmes’ and the significant increase from 24.26% in 2018/19 to 35.20% in 2019/20 – it asked how this had happened. The Employment and Training Manager recognised the significant change and noted this was most prominent in the benefit claimant rates in young people. At the height of claims in May/June 2020, 10.1% of young people claimed benefits and since, funding from the Scottish Government and Falkirk Council had been

implemented to increase engagement of young people into training and employment programmes.

Following on from a request of more information about the Inner Forth Landscape Project and how Falkirk, Stirling and Clackmannanshire councils worked together, the Acting Director of Development Services stated that this initiative was the foundation for other projects of the same nature and it was important in mitigating the threat of flooding across the Forth. The Climate Forth Project was an extension of this and included areas of sustainable drainage, such as Skinflats – this type of measure was being encouraged elsewhere in the Forth. He further explained that Stirling University was launching the International Environment Centre. Falkirk had previously worked with the University and were continuing to do so to highlight any possibility of risk and take measures to prevent flooding. The work was extended to increase areas of woodland, moss and introduce new walkways in hopes of decreasing carbon emissions.

Members emphasised the importance of climate change efforts and the urgency that it required – Mr Duff echoed this and explained that the Forth Valley for Net Zero had been established which showed the benefits of collective efforts to combat climate change.

## **Decision**

**The Scrutiny Committee noted the performance of the Council in relation to Enterprise.**