

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the Coat of Arms of the City of Edinburgh. The crest includes a crown with four thistles, a shield divided into four quarters (top-left: a saltire, top-right: a stag's head, bottom-left: a ship, bottom-right: a bird), and a motto scroll at the bottom. The text "Agenda Item 3" is centered over the top half of the shield.

# **Agenda Item 3**

## **Minute**

Draft

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held remotely on Thursday 27 January 2022 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Councillors:** Lorna Binnie  
Jim Blackwood  
Niall Coleman  
David Grant  
John McLuckie  
John Patrick (convener)  
Depute Provost Ann Ritchie

**Councillors also attending:** Jim Flynn  
Nigel Harris

**Officers:** Karen Algie, Head of People Technology & Transformation  
Malcolm Bennie, Director of Place Services  
Sophie Dick, Democratic Services Graduate  
Tracey Gillespie, Human Resource Manager  
Craig Isdale, Asset Manager  
Lisa McCabe, Service Manager  
Anne-Marie Neilson, Customer & Business Support Manager  
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager

**S33. Apologies**

An apology was submitted on behalf of Councillor Balfour.

**S34. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations were made.

**S35. Minute**

**Decision**

**The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 11 November 2021 was approved.**

### **S36. Rolling Action Log**

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

The committee sought clarification on when ID 508, 'Progress Report – Slamannan Primary School and Early Learning Class' would be presented to committee. The Service Manager for Children's Services assured members that it would come to the next Scrutiny meeting as Education Scotland had now submitted the relevant report. The Democratic Services Manager explained that a further Scrutiny meeting would be held prior to the Local Government Elections and suggested it would be in March.

Members asked why ID 553, 'Report of the Scrutiny Panel – Pupil Equity Fund' remained on the Rolling Action Log – it was explained that as part of the recommendations, an update report on the PEF arrangements and outcomes would come back to committee. This update report had an expected reporting date of 25 November 2022 as this would allow for a full evaluation of results to be considered.

#### **Decision**

**The committee noted the Rolling Action Log**

### **S37. The Corporate Plan 2020-2022 – Innovation**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting performance information on the Innovation priority. The Council priorities were approved in the Corporate Plan 2020 - 2022 on 30 September 2020. The priorities were Communities, Enterprise and Innovation.

This was the seventh Council performance report to the Scrutiny Committee on its progress against delivering its priorities. This was the second round of reporting specifically on Innovation.

The work included the delivery of Council of the Future (COTF) Innovations- they were directed by the Innovation Workstream Board which reviewed, supported and ensured the delivery of all the Innovation projects.

The Innovation Priority focused on transforming services, key projects were:-

- ZBB Transport
- ZBB Education
- Council HQ & Arts Centre
- Analogue to Digital Telecare
- Business Intelligence
- Office Transformation

- Automation
- CCTV
- Digital Communities
- Fit for the Future
- Liquid Logic SWiS Replacement
- M365 (RST)

The period July – December 2020 averaged 28,427 calls to the Contact Centre per month and had reduced to 23,512 in the same period in 2021. Within the 2021 reporting period, 2 additional full-time staff members were employed in the Contact Centre. Members noted these changes and questioned the level of improvement made by the Contact Centre. The Head of People Technology & Transformation highlighted that the average number of calls answered by the Contact Centre had increased from 16,583 to 17,871, thus greater efficiency with the additional staff members. The Customer & Business Support Manager further noted that the average wait to have a call answered had significantly dropped from 7.74 to 4.28 minutes, however, the information provided omits details on length of calls which could offer further insight. Ms Neilson explained that agent performance had become a focus – this would unveil the average length of call, downtime and proportion of their day on calls per operator, allowing further training to occur to improve efficiency.

The Customer & Business Support Manager clarified that the number of calls did not include automatic payment calls, only calls that had been handled by an operator.

Following a question on how successful the introduction of the automated payment line had been, Ms Neilson explained that some individuals continued to call the Contact Centre instead. However, call handlers were advised to ask why they preferred over the phone rather than the automated payment. She recognised that the automated payment system was not suitable for everyone thus alternative methods, such as Direct Debits, were also promoted.

Within Appendix 4 of the report, 'Innovation – Performance Indicators', Code CD 02.CHS% 'Sickness Absence: Craft Staff' presented the value as a %. Members noted that it may be useful to include the total number of employees within the department to offer a greater insight into the scale of the issue. The Head of People Technology & Transformation clarified that this specific indicator related to roughly 1,300 employees and was happy amend the table to include total number employees in the next report.

Following on from this, the committee asked why the target for sickness absence for 2021/22 sat at 4% rather than 0%. Ms Algie explained targets must be realistic and achievable for the managers for which they were set – being realistic would require the recognition of the level of wellbeing within the workforce. She stated that targets were reviewed and amended when required. Despite Services having not met the 4% target, there was a trend that the rate of absences was improving (setting aside Covid-related

impacts). There were many factors to consider when focusing on absence which included the implementation of policy, feedback on working conditions and ensuring proactive actions were undertaken with the purpose of supporting individuals. Furthermore, communication and engagement with employees regarding expectations was central although complex, this complexity must be reflected in policy and manager response.

In terms of what protocols were in place for absences, employees were required to contact their managers on Day 1, 4 and 7. A medically certified absence required managers to maintain regular contact to check up on the individual's wellbeing and other points of contact, such as referrals to Occupational Health, would be available. The Head of People Technology & Transformation also explained that the Council's website provided helpful links which would be discussed in a later report.

Members noted that during the July – December 2021 period, 5,641 calls were not answered by the Contact Centre which would amount to roughly  $\frac{1}{4}$  of all calls made per month. They asked how this compared to other Councils nationally. The Customer & Business Support Manager emphasised the volume of calls that come through to the Call Centre between 9am and 9.45am. Ms Neilson discussed a pilot project that had been launched in relation to Social Work call handling (prioritised calls) – between October – December 2021, calls were dispersed to Local Officer Support Staff during peak times which amounted to 15 additional trained call handlers. This had proven to reduce abandoned calls and was becoming a permanent change on 7 February 2022. As this had proven to be successful, further work was undertaken to evaluate areas where this pilot project could be extended to – employing more call handlers would not be cost effective as there was no demand out-with peak times.

In terms of a timescale for extending this project, the Customer & Business Support Manager stated that identifying possible areas was still in primary stages. There were challenges relating to grading – Social Work Call Handlers were the same grade as Local Officer Support Staff whereas the wider Contact Centre call staff were of a higher grade of Service Staff. Furthermore, the Unified Customer Journey Project also had an impact on the roll out of this project as the purpose of this was to reduce the volume of calls made to the Contact Centre.

Members wanted to know what % of calls made to the Contact Centre were "Interactions" – calls which were follow-ups to check progress against a request for service.

The committee sought for greater clarity on the improvements made within the Contact Centre given that abandoned calls seemed to be a reoccurring issue. They also asked if abandoned calls could be chased up during downtimes. The Customer & Business Support Manager referred to the decline of 4,915 calls when comparing July - December 2020 to the same period in 2021, but yet there was an increase of 1,288 calls answered by the Contact Centre per month in 2021. Therefore, an improvement in

performance. In terms of benchmarking the performance, the Council had been a member of various groups working with other Councils with the purpose to establish a benchmarking framework. However, it was concluded that it was not possible due to the infrastructure and expectations of the different Contact Centres varying, thus unable to draw comparisons. As previously mentioned, focus to improve performance was placed upon analysing individual's performance through evaluation of statistics and data. There was an expectation that going forward, performance would continue to improve.

The committee referred to the priority of calls for Social Work and questioned if priority areas could include other Services given the emergency that members of the public may be in.

Following a question on how accessible Hubs were in terms of taking payments, as it had been suggested that they no longer accept cheques, the Head of People Technology & Transformation stated they would refer back to committee with more information.

The report noted the success of Round 1 of Community Choices as it resulted in 36 local community groups across the Falkirk Council area securing more than £51k of extra funding. Members suggested that there was a disparity in engagement within the Council wards and further work should be done to connect with those areas that have not shown interest in Community Choices. The Head of People Technology & Transformation assured committee that work was ongoing to engage with all communities and continue the development of Community Choices. Ms Algie was happy to take the comments back to the relevant team.

Performance Indicator DVS\_P&T\_WEA01 & 02 both showed a short trend decline in the average time taken (in weeks) to determine a Local Development (Non/Householder) planning application, which was a positive. However, the committee noted that the application may not be finalised at this point due to the involvement of Health Boards, when required, thus applicants waiting an extended period. It asked if the process could change to reduce this waiting time. The Director of Place Services stated he would refer back to committee with greater information.

The % of the highest paid 5% employees who were women had decreased from 49.33% in 2018/19 to 48.55% in 2019/20, which was lower than the national average of 56.74%. Members asked what was being done to rectify this. The Head of People Technology & Transformation understood this perspective but assured members that the recruitment process was centred around appointing the right person for the position and would be difficult to appoint someone solely based on their gender. In terms of attracting women to the role, the process in placed had to be fair, open and appealing. Ms Algie noted the difficulty in ensuring flexibility within these roles that may deter any person of any gender in applying. She recognised the difficulty in responding to this issue due to the complex nature of it.

## **Decision**

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

The committee then adjourned at 10.55 a.m. to allow those members present who were not members of the committee to leave and reconvened at 11.00 a.m. with the committee members present as per the sederunt.

### **S38. Employee Wellbeing**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting an update on actions being progressed to support Employee Wellbeing during the pandemic.

The report detailed what actions had been implemented by the Council as a response to the pandemic, this included general safety within the workplace, covering risk assessments and PPE, as well as further mental wellbeing responses such as an establishment of a Covid wellbeing page, the Council's Wellbeing Group and Covid FAQ sessions.

A number of surveys took place between Autumn 2020 and Autumn 2021 – notably, in Spring 2021, a report from See Me Scotland detailed the findings from the survey undertaken in December 2020/January 2021. It was unveiled that lockdown had created added pressure on employee's mental health. A further pulse survey was also undertaken to develop an action plan to cover findings from both surveys.

Appendix 1 of the report outlined that employee experience and the corresponding action plan.

A pulse survey was undertaken on hybrid working arrangements, from those who responded, 73.4% indicated a preference to work less than 1 or 1-2 days per week from the office. The members questioned if this was an unexpectedly high rate and if the Council had capacity to continue with a low-rate of employees working within their buildings. The Human Resource Manager explained that as a result of efforts taken by the Council throughout the period of the pandemic, employees had become productive when working from home. When moving forward, if suitable technology was in place, it would continue to be utilised from any location. She clarified that HR would promote employees to come into buildings for 1-2-1s with managers and team collaboration to ensure some social interaction. In terms of individual's returning to work, the purpose and work being undertaken had to be clarified. Ms Gillespie stated she was not surprised by the results, although there had been a change in results when comparing to previous surveys as it had become apparent that employees had become more comfortable working from home. The survey results were comparative to national surveys.

Following a concern regarding capacity issues when returning to work, the Human Resource Manager explained that the Foundry had been based upon a 0.5 FTE. She recognised the necessity for this, and other buildings that had been refurbished, to be reassessed in terms of capacity and usage when the time was appropriate.

As part of the 'Employee Experience Action Plan', a key issue identified was 'Employees want more wellbeing support to which 'Leaders and managers will carry out regular check-ins with employees...'. The committee asked what resources were available for this and how regular these check-ins would occur. Ms Gillespie explained that 1-2-1s and supervision across teams was already being implemented at a regular rate. The check-ins were not time consuming for the employees as it was primarily about keeping in contact and being listened to. Therefore, there would be no extreme cost in resources. The regularity of check-ins is dependent on the individual, as she highlighted those who live alone may require greater focus.

The committee asked what actions and support were in place to help those employees who may struggle to be open and honest about how they were feeling with their managers. The Human Resource Manager explained that a counselling service was available as well as Occupational Health Provision, and a range of sources available online. Managers were also offered coaching to ensure they were fit and ready to respond to issues that may arise.

The Council had agreed to establish a mental health culture which would embrace inclusion by talking openly about the needs of others and create a team which valued difference. Members asked how this would be achieved without fear of judgement from others and if mental health would be treated the same as physical. Ms Gillespie confirmed that mental health would be treated the same and was important to do so. In relation to establishing the culture, a number of actions were to be undertaken in terms of promoting good mental health and encourage an open, comfortable environment. The ultimate purpose for this would be to increase awareness amongst employees and making people feel comfortable – to achieve this, it was central to signpost where staff could receive help.

Members sought for clarity on what was meant by 'Trade Unions are unable to agree the Hybrid Policy at this time'. The Human Resource Manager explained that discussions had occurred with Trade Unions regarding the return to work and recognised the complex position Trade Unions were in given they had to be reflective of a range of opinions. One central barrier to agreement was the loss of SJC Pay Claims – nationally, SJC had raised the working from home as part of their pay claim. The local agreement to continue to work from home placed the Trade Unions in a weaker national position to negotiate. Trade Unions had considered arrangements on a voluntary basis rather than guidance to allow individuals to opt-in to returning to work.



The committee then noted the benefits of returning to work as support from line managers would be easily accessible. Furthermore, a persistent issue for some was a lack of space when working from home which would no longer be an issue. In terms of preparing for working long-term from home, it highlighted that measures had to be in place to ensure health, such as back pains, would not worsen and members of staff would not work over their expected hours.

The Human Resource Manager, following a question, clarified that managers had been advised to prioritise space within facilities when returning to work for those who would benefit most from working out-with their home environment. For example, those who did not have a suitable working space within their home or struggling with mental wellbeing. She believed that the Foundry would have sufficient space given employee's preferences on the homeworking balance.

### **Decision**

**The Scrutiny Committee noted the wide range of actions undertaken to support employees' wellbeing since March 2020.**

### **S39. Care Inspectorate Inspection Report and Action Plan – Rannoch Early Learning and Childcare Centre**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services presenting the findings of the Care Inspectorate's inspection of Rannoch Early Learning and Childcare Centre in September 2021 together with the establishment's action plan.

Appendices 1 and 2 contain the published inspection report and the establishment's action plan, respectively.

The committee noted that the Care Inspectorate did not grade 'Quality of staffing' and 'Quality of management and leadership' to which the Service Manager explained the Inspectorate held the right to carry out these inspections, however, they chose not to. Therefore, indicating that the Care Inspectorate did not have any concerns regarding these areas of service and held a level of confidence within management and staff to implement change.

Ms McCabe stated that Rannoch Early Learning and Childcare Centre would be investing funds into the improvement of the property with some cosmetic repairs. Members referred to Recommendation 1, which stated 'The provider should improve the play environment for children...can freely access a wide range of open-ended, real-life and natural materials for play'. They asked if the cosmetic changes responded to this recommendation. The Service Manager explained that cosmetic work was limited to the inside of the building, including repairs to paintwork and relaying flooring. Rannoch had undertaken extensive external changes – cleaning sandpits and weeding of

their garden were examples, both of which were supported by parents and the wider local community. As part of the wider service delivery, Ms McCabe emphasised that outdoor child play was always encouraged to all locations due to how important it was. In terms of the 'open-ended, real life and natural materials for play', ongoing national research was being conducted into this area to highlight the positive impact it has on a child's imagination and development.

Following on, the committee requested further clarity on Recommendation 1 when stating 'There should be an appropriate balance between organised and freely chosen play experiences...', the Service Manager explained that both experiences were at Rannoch at present, but there should be a greater balance. National guidance had suggested that young children were spending a longer period of time within childcare centres than ever before thus requiring the question of how stimulating play was. National research showed that toys which did not overly guide a child on how to play sustained their interest and developed their imagination. The recommendation invited Rannoch into a self-evaluation and audit of their own environment and conclude on their balance of play experience. Ms McCabe stated that since the investigation had taken place, considerable improvements had been made.

## **Decision**

### **The Scrutiny Committee:-**

- (1) noted the report; and**
- (2) agreed to request a further report once the follow-up report from the inspectorate has been completed.**