

**RECORD OF VOTES TAKEN AT THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE
ON TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2016**

Councillors in attendance:

David Alexander	Dennis Goldie	Alan Nimmo
Jim Blackwood	Linda Gow	Craig Martin
Tom Coleman	Adrian Mahoney	Craig R Martin

Councillors not in attendance – Gerry Goldie, Malcolm Nicol and Robert Spears.

Agenda Item: 5	Subject:	TENANT & CUSTOMER PARTICIPATION STRATEGY 2016-19										
<div>MOTION</div> <div>The Executive approves the Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy 2016-2019 and the associated action plan.</div> <div>Moved by: C Martin Seconded by: J Blackwood</div>												
<div>AMENDMENT</div> <div><i>In addition to the motion, an annual postal survey of all tenants is undertaken each year at the same time as information is provided about any proposed rent increase.</i></div> <div>Moved by: D Alexander Seconded by: T Coleman</div>												
<div><div>VOTE</div><div><div>For the motion (7)</div><div><table><tr><td>Jim Blackwood</td><td>Alan Nimmo</td></tr><tr><td>Dennis Goldie</td><td>Craig Martin</td></tr><tr><td>Linda Gow</td><td>Craig R Martin</td></tr><tr><td>Adrian Mahoney</td><td></td></tr></table></div></div><div><div>For the amendment (2)</div><div><table><tr><td>David Alexander</td><td>Tom Coleman</td></tr></table></div></div></div>			Jim Blackwood	Alan Nimmo	Dennis Goldie	Craig Martin	Linda Gow	Craig R Martin	Adrian Mahoney		David Alexander	Tom Coleman
Jim Blackwood	Alan Nimmo											
Dennis Goldie	Craig Martin											
Linda Gow	Craig R Martin											
Adrian Mahoney												
David Alexander	Tom Coleman											
Decision: Motion carried.												

Notes

1. This voting record is subject to approval of the formal minute at the next meeting of the Executive on 15 March 2016.
2. Only those items where a vote was taken are recorded here. For information about decisions reached on any other items considered at this meeting, please contact Brian Pirie, 01324 506110.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the EXECUTIVE held within the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on TUESDAY 12 JANUARY 2016 at 9.30 a.m.

COUNCILLORS:

David Alexander	Adrian Mahoney
Jim Blackwood	Craig Martin (Convener)
Tom Coleman	Dr Craig R Martin
Dennis Goldie	Alan Nimmo
Gerry Goldie	Robert Spears
Linda Gow	

OFFICERS:

Robin Baird, Waste Strategy Co-ordinator
Nick Burgess, Service Manager, Children's Services
Arlene Fraser, Committee Services Officer
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing Services
Bryan Smail, Chief Finance Officer

EX77. APOLOGY

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Nicol.

EX78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were made.

EX79. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 December 2015 was approved.

Councillor G Goldie entered the meeting during consideration of the following item.

EX80. PROCESSING OF BLUE BIN MATERIAL AND CHARTER FOR HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING IN SCOTLAND

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Development Services presenting the current situation regarding the processing of the Council's blue bin material as well as an update on the recommendations of the Policy Development Panel (PDP), which was established to consider the implications of the Charter for Household Recycling in Scotland.

Members had agreed at the Executive meeting on 20 October 2015 (ref EX68), to authorise the Director of Development Services to review all costs associated with the blue bin collection service in order to present options to a future meeting. Since October 2015, various factors have impacted on the cost of processing blue bin material, with costs having reached unsustainable levels.

Two available options have been identified, which are to either remain with the current provider/seek an alternative provider, or to process the material at the Council's current bulking facility.

The report also referred to the Household Recycling Charter for Scotland which was agreed by CoSLA leaders in August 2015. The Charter identified 21 key principles and referred to the development of a Code of Practice for use by local authorities in Scotland in an effort to achieve consistency across waste and recycling services.

The Executive established a policy development panel on 20 October 2016 (ref EX68) to consider the implications of the forthcoming Recycling Charter. The report summarised the work of the panel, which comprised Councillors Dr C R Martin (chair), S Bird, J Blackwood, P Garner and A Nimmo. After completion of the PDP process, members agreed that the principles of the Charter for Household Recycling in Scotland were sound and as such agreed to recommend the signing of the Charter to the Executive.

Decision

The Executive agreed:-

- (1) that the processing of the Council's blue bin material be undertaken at the Council's current bulking facility and authorised the Director of Development Services to take forward the measures required for implementation as set out at Option 2 (paragraphs 2.7-2.9) in the report, and**
- (2) to sign the Charter for Household Recycling in Scotland and to the development of a transition plan for future consideration.**

The Executive wished to convey its thanks to the refuse collection team for the work they carried out during the festive period in what were, at times, extreme weather conditions.

Councillor G Goldie left the meeting during consideration of the following item.

EX81. FALKIRK COMMUNITY JUSTICE DRAFT TRANSITION PLAN

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Children's Services detailing the Community Planning Partnership's requirement to produce a Community Justice Plan to the Scottish Government by 31 January 2016, and attaching as an appendix, the Falkirk Community Justice draft Transition Plan for consideration.

At present, the Community Justice Bill is before Parliament and includes the abolition of the role and function of the Community Justice Authority for Fife and Forth Valley. The Bill sets out the responsibilities to be undertaken by the Community Planning process within Council areas from 1 April 2017.

The Community Planning Partnership's draft Transition Plan sets out the proposed governance arrangements for Falkirk Community Justice during the "shadow" year 2016/17.

Decision

The Executive endorsed the draft Transition Plan for submission to the Community Planning Partnership for its approval.

Councillor Gow left the meeting after consideration of the foregoing item of business.

Councillors G Goldie and Gow re-entered the meeting during consideration of the following item of business.

EX82. FINANCIAL POSITION 2015/16

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services advising of the financial position of the Council for 2015/16 and reflecting on the situation as at 31 December 2015. The opportunity was also taken to update Members on the position of the Reserves consistent with the policy approved by the Executive in January 2015.

Net expenditure was currently forecast to be £2.055m (0.6%) below the approved budget, which was a favourable movement of £1.780m from the position reported in October. The report summarised the main deviations from budget.

Spending within the Housing Revenue Account was in line with budget, leading to projected year-end reserves of £5.093m.

The projected year end positions in regard to the Trading Account and General Fund Reserves were also provided, together with details of movement on the Repairs and Renewals Fund. Information was also provided on workforce changes and the progress made by Services to date.

The Executive noted:-

- (1) the Council's projected year-end financial position for 2015/16;**
- (2) the position with reserves.**

EX83. SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT BUDGET AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT SETTLEMENT 2016/17

The Executive considered a joint report by the Chief Executive and the Director of Corporate and Housing Services summarising the implications for local government, following the announcement of the Scottish Government draft Budget and the Local Government Settlement 2016/17.

The 2016/17 draft Scottish Government Budget proposes a 3.5% (£350m) reduction in local government revenue support, whereas Health is to receive a 3.3% increase. Part of the £400m increase in Health is accounted for by the £250m directed to the new Health and Social Care Partnerships. However, it is still to be clarified as to what access the Council will have to this fund and what room for manoeuvre there will be for the Council in considering its budget setting.

The General Capital grant allocation for Falkirk Council for 2016/17 is £10.6m, which is c15% less than the current financial year.

This reduction in the Council's grant resources essentially increases the deficit for 2016/17 from that previously projected by £6m to nearly £25m. The Council's share of the £250m directed to new Health and Social Care Partnerships has been estimated, and would broadly match the extra £6m shortfall.

The Deputy First Minister had written to all Councils on 16 December 2015, setting out the terms of the settlement and package of measures. He requested that any Council not intending to take up the offer and agree the terms of the full package of measures, write to him by 22 January 2016.

Councillor C Martin, seconded by Councillor Dr C R Martin, moved that a response be sent to Mr Swinney advising that, until the position on the £250m, together with penalties for not accepting the proposals in Mr Swinney's letter is clarified, Falkirk Council is not reasonably in a position to accept his offer.

Decision

The Executive:-

- (1) noted the draft Scottish Government Budget and Local Government Settlement 2016/17, and**
- (2) agreed that a response be sent to Mr Swinney advising that, until the position on the £250m, together with penalties for not accepting the proposals in Mr Swinney's letter, is clarified, Falkirk Council is not reasonably in a position to accept his offer.**

EX84. THE COMMISSION ON LOCAL TAX REFORM

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services summarising the findings from the Commission on Local Tax Reform's (the Commission) report titled "Just Change: A New Approach to Local Taxation".

The Commission was established jointly between the Scottish Government and CoSLA and was tasked with identifying and examining alternatives to the current council tax which would deliver a fairer system of local taxation in order to support the funding of local government services.

It is highlighted in the Commission's report that a new taxation system could not be enacted prior to the local government elections in 2017.

Decision

The Executive noted the contents of the report.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of SPECIAL MEETING of the EXECUTIVE held within the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on FRIDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2016 at 2.30 p.m.

<u>COUNCILLORS:</u>	David Alexander	Adrian Mahoney
	Jim Blackwood	Craig Martin (Convener)
	Dennis Goldie	Dr Craig R Martin
	Gerry Goldie	Alan Nimmo
	Linda Gow	Robert Spears

OFFICERS:

Rose Mary Glackin, Chief Governance Officer
Joe McElholm, Head of Social Work Adult Services
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Mary Pitcaithly, Chief Executive
Stuart Ritchie, Director of Corporate and Housing Services
Bryan Smail, Chief Finance Officer

EX85. APOLOGIES

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Councillors Coleman and Nicol.

EX86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations were intimated.

EX87. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SETTLEMENT UPDATE POSITION

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services advising of the final details of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17 as laid out in a letter from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy, John Swinney, to COSLA.

A report to the Executive on 12 January 2016 (Ref EX82) summarised the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17, as set out in a letter from Mr Swinney to COSLA dated 16 December 2015. Since 12 January 2016 there had been further discussions and correspondence between the Scottish Government and COSLA in regard to the detail of the settlement. A letter from Mr Swinney to COSLA, dated 27 January 2016, set out the final details, with particular regard to:-

- Council Tax Freeze;
- Teacher numbers; and
- Integration Joint Board Integration Fund.

Councils were required to accept the complete package failing which significant grant penalties would apply. The deadline for acceptance was 9 February 2016.

The report summarised the implications of the proposed settlement for Falkirk Council and estimated that, should Council not accept the terms, the sum of £11.75m in grant would be at risk, based on our share of population.

The Chief Governance Officer advised that a number of Councils were exploring grounds to judicially review the terms of the settlement.

Councillor C Martin, seconded by Councillor Dr C R Martin, moved that:-

Subject to advice being received ahead of the deadline on the availability of grounds to judicially review it (in which case another meeting of the Executive will be called), Council reluctantly accepts the terms of the settlement letter from the Cabinet Secretary dated 27 January 2016 but, in doing so, agrees that the following points must be made:

- 1) The current financial circumstances facing local government are particularly challenging and any measures which restrict how councils raise and spend their funding are not helpful at this time;*
- 2) The continued freeze in the council tax reduces local accountability and constrains severely the ability of councils to take financial decisions for their own communities;*
- 3) The focus on pupil/teacher numbers at a national level takes no account of local circumstances and again reduces the ability of local members to take local decisions; and*
- 4) Whilst sharing the Cabinet Secretary's desire to see the living wage paid across the care sector the Council recognises, as set out in the Scottish Government's own statutory guidance that "contracting authorities are unable to make payment of the Living Wage a mandatory requirement as part of a competitive procurement process". While Council will continue to pursue fair working practices in all its contracts, consistent with the law, the ability to "ensure" payment of the living wage and to force our private and voluntary partners to pay it and to meet their share of the costs involved remains constrained.*

The Executive then adjourned for 15 minutes to allow members of the opposition to consider the terms of the motion and reconvened at 3.15pm with all members present as per the sederunt.

As an amendment, Councillor Alexander, seconded by Councillor Spears, moved in substitution for the motion that:-

Council agrees to accept the Scottish Government's offer of funding for 2016/17 as the best possible settlement given the significant cuts in their budget from Westminster's austerity agenda.

On a division 8 members voted for the motion and 2 voted for the amendment with voting as follows:-

For the motion (8) –Councillors Blackwood, D Goldie, G Goldie, Gow, Mahoney, C Martin, Dr C R Martin and Nimmo.

For the amendment (2) – Councillors Alexander and Spears.

Decision

The Executive agreed the motion.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**Subject: REFERRALS FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 FEBRUARY 2016
ROWANS SHORT BREAK SERVICE
SOCIAL WORK CHILDREN & FAMILIES BUDGET UPDATE**
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 23 February 2016
**Authors: DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND HEAD OF SOCIAL
WORK ADULT SERVICES**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to refer recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee to the Executive for consideration.

2. ROWANS SHORT BREAK SERVICE

- 2.1 The Committee considered a report by the Head of Social Work Adult Services which provided information on the consultation and engagement work which had been undertaken with families who would be affected by the service closure; occupancy levels; the views of service users and families and lessons learned from the budget decision process. A copy of the report is attached as appendix one.
- 2.2 The Scrutiny Committee agreed to refer the report to the Executive in relation to section 5 thereof and recommend that:-
- (i) where service redesign is undertaken in the future it is carried out using a model of co-production with service users and
 - (ii) there is greater clarity provided around decisions made in the budget process.

3. SOCIAL WORK CHILDREN & FAMILIES BUDGET UPDATE

- 3.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided information on budget expenditure from 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2015, the main pressure areas, contextual information and actions being taken to manage the budget. A copy of the report is attached as appendix two.
- 3.2 The Scrutiny Committee agreed to draw the information in paragraph 2.7 of the report to the attention of the Executive and to recommend that action is taken to set a realistic budget for external fostering.

4. RECOMMENDATION

4.1 In accordance with paragraphs 2.2 and 3.2 above, the Executive is invited to consider the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee that:-

- (i) where service redesign is undertaken in the future it is carried out using a model of co-production with service users;**
- (ii) there is greater clarity provided around decisions made in the budget process; and**
- (iii) action is taken to set a realistic budget for external fostering.**

.....
Director of Children's Services
Date: 9 February 2016
Contact Officer: Jack Frawley - 01324 506116

.....
Head of Social Work Adult Services

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: ROWANS SHORT BREAK SERVICE
Meeting: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Date: 4 FEBRUARY 2016
Author: HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK ADULT SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Rowans Short Break Service is open 52 weeks of the year and provides a residential short break to adults with learning disabilities. The bungalow situated in Larbert is a registered service with the Care Inspectorate and offers respite to those between the ages of 18yrs – 65yrs. The service is fully funded by the Council.
- 1.2 An internal review was carried out in in 2014 relating to the provision of respite/short breaks for adults with learning disabilities. Although it was recognised that the service was one of excellent standard and regarded highly by service users and carers, it compared unfavourably in financial spend terms when compared with similar external provision. This led to a proposal being made as part of the 2015 budget process to close the Rowans and provide the service through external providers. This was agreed by the Council as part of the provisional budget for 2016/17 with a projected saving of £100k.
- 1.3 A comprehensive Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment was undertaken at the time which acknowledged that a change in provision would be unsettling and anxiety provoking for service users and carers.
- 1.4 On the 15th of October 2015, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the service. The Interim Head of Adult Services advised that the service would remain open at least until 31st March 2106 and that a review of the planned closure of the service would be undertaken. This was taken against a background of concerns expressed by the families of service users over the level of consultation and the lack of alternative provision within the council area. A review has been undertaken, which has been led by the relevant Service Manager.

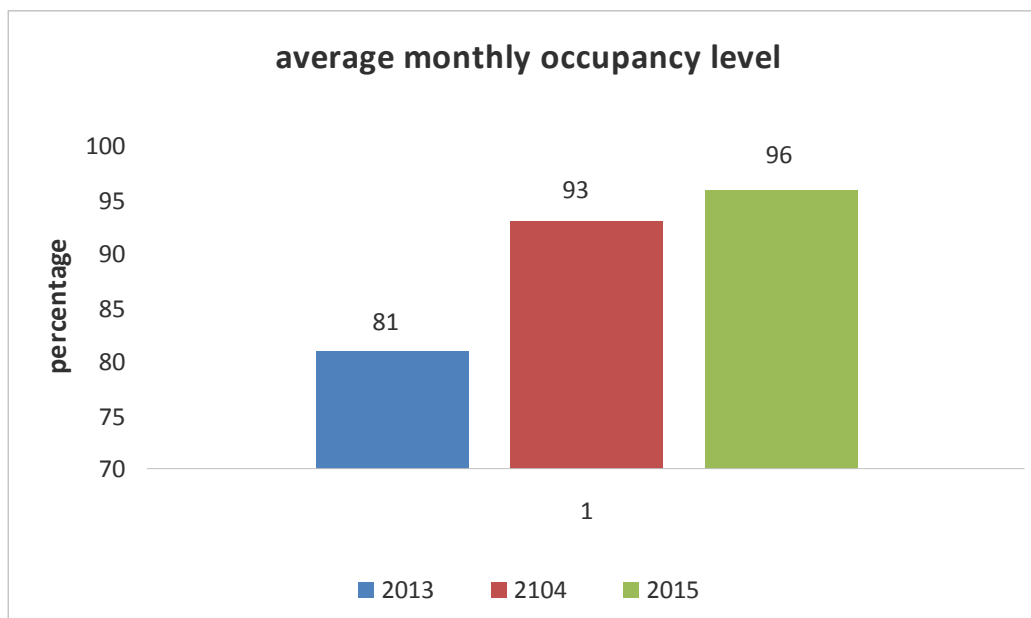
2. CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT WORK

- 2.1 The Service Manager held an initial meeting with families that would be affected by the closure of the service. The meeting was held at the Sensory Centre on 28 October 2015. Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer was in attendance. Over 30 families attended these meetings and during lengthy discussions, parents conveyed the following points of concern and worry. These are as follows:
 - Occupancy Levels – There was concern that under occupancy had been taken into account in reaching the view that the running cost of the establishment was too high when the service was now fully occupied.

- Alternative Short Break Provision - Contact with Community Care Workers had been limited, therefore the option to explore alternative respite provision with families for their family member had not been satisfactory. Parents and Carers had a need to have information to support them to make informed choices in relation to alternative provision.
 - Occupancy levels at the Meadows and cost of the 2 contracted beds.
 - Eligibility Criteria and respite entitlement – There were queries raised by some families as it had been indicated that there were occasions in the past where they had been informed that they could not access the Rowans Service. Families requested clarification on what is the breakdown of those service users accessing the Rowans under the eligibility criteria.
 - The flat rate contribution - A question arose about and why there is a difference between the Meadows and Rowans Short Break Service in relation to charging?
 - Hidden costs associated with transport – Families and carers noted that this was an additional burden when accessing alternative short break provision outwith the Falkirk Council area.
 - Integration Joint Board and the Draft Falkirk Integrated Strategic Plan 2016-2019 – Families and Carers raised concerns about how this will impact on Falkirk Council Short Break Respite provision. The concern was also raised that the closure did not reflect well on the stated aims in the Integration Scheme and the draft Strategic Plan about supporting carers.
 - More broadly, there was concern that the closure would impact on a group of carers who needed the respite provision to support the care they provided which in turn prevented the Council from having to bear the cost of providing care. In the view of those attending the meeting the alternatives did not make like for like provision as the need was for provision close to home to minimise travel and ensure that families were close to hand should the need arise.
- 2.2 It was agreed that a second follow up meeting would be held with the parents and carers 4-6 weeks after, to allow research and findings into the areas of concerns documented to be undertaken and feedback to be provided to families and carers.
- 2.3 A further meeting took place on the 7th of December 2015 at Dundas Resource Centre. Deirdre Cilliers, Interim Head of Service was present and Suzanne Thomson, Programme Manager Health & Social Care Integration (Falkirk) was invited along to speak with the parents/carers surrounding the role of Integration Joint Board. Around 30-35 families attended the meeting.

2.4 A presentation was given in response to the points which had been previously raised at the October meeting. These were as follows:

- Occupancy Levels - in 2013 to 2015 there has been a significant increase in the number of beds occupied due to a management restructure and environment upgrade. This had risen from 81% to 96%.



- Current eligibility criteria is described as:

Eligibility	
Critical	42 nights
Substantial	28 nights
Moderate	14 nights

The majority of service users that access the Rowans are assessed as being critical (37%) or substantial (35%).

- In relation to the Meadows, the occupancy level was 72%. At present the cost to access the Meadows is means tested and costs £100 per week compared with that of £64.40 per week for the Rowans. The difference in approach has been highlighted in the review. The difference is not considered to be justifiable and were the service to remain open, a recommendation would be made to Council that the charging approach be aligned. This would have the impact of making a modest increase in the income from charging to offset the cost of the service.
- All the proposed alternative services (with the exception of the Meadows) are outwith Falkirk Council area and there would be additional costs if the Council had to assist with transport. The cost does vary substantially depending on whether it is a voluntary driver or a taxi.

3. VIEWS OF SERVICE USERS AND FAMILIES

- 3.1 Families have expressed the view that they have been put under stress and worry surrounding the basic care needs which they feel their family members are entitled to access within their own local community. Parents feel that the Council should enable them to exercise as much choice as possible over the providers that they wish to use for those whom they care for at home.
- 3.2 Carers stated that Rowans is a valued service which is person centred in its approach and they can trust to look after their family member whilst they have a break to recuperate and have time to engage with other day to day activities outwith their caring responsibilities.
- 3.3 Parents and carers have concerns over the amount of emotional distress caused to those they care for due to the transition of unnecessary change and the possibility of an individual's health deteriorating whilst on a short break especially if this is an hour or more away by car. This causes further burden and worry to carers.
- 3.4 Parents and carers have felt that their views have not been taken into account throughout the initial process of the proposed closure of the Rowans and that the consultation was inadequate.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 It is acknowledged that there are no other similar short break services (other than the Meadows) within the Falkirk Council area which parents and carers can access. On the 1st of December an event was hosted in the Sensory Centre by the Short Breaks Bureau, inviting along external providers from other local authority areas to meet with parents and carers. This was to give families the opportunity to learn more about the alternative provisions which are available to those service users with learning disability. However, at the meeting held on the 7th of December, parents and carers advised that they continued to feel that services should be closer to home and not outwith their own community.
- 4.2 Recently a moratorium was temporarily placed on the Meadows from the 1st December 2015 to the 18th December 2015 subject to an investigation. This unfortunate situation emphasised the Meadows as the only other local provider for respite for those with a learning disability. More recently, PSS the service provider of the Meadows has advised that they are taking a close look at the financial sustainability of their services in Scotland and undertaking statutory consultation with staff on the future of the services.
- 4.3 Although at close to full occupancy, the unit cost of providing respite in the Rowans remains significantly higher than alternative providers. The fundamental premise on which the proposal was based remains sound. It is likely that there would be some transport costs which would diminish the savings anticipated from closure but not to the extent of making a significant difference. Consideration has been given to reducing costs in the Rowans and there is scope for running the service with one fewer member of staff through non replacement of a post. Combined with additional charging, this would reduce the overall cost by c.£25k.

- 4.4 The more fundamental point posed by the families, however, is whether it is right to proceed to close the service where this would leave only the Meadows as local provision. This concern would gain added weight if PSS were to close the Meadows. It is recognised that respite services are central to achieving care in the community and containing the cost of long term care. Current policy initiatives are focused on improving support for carers these continue to emphasise to importance of respite care and appropriate short breaks.
- 4.5 If the service were to remain open, further work will be required to determine if costs can be reduced to a more sustainable level.

5. LESSONS LEARNED

- 5.1 It is suggested that the lessons from the process surrounding the decision to close the Rowans are twofold. First, where a proposal is likely to have a very significant impact on a defined group of services users, early engagement with service users (which in this situation would include families) is important. Second, there is need for clarity around decision making processes in the budget.
- 5.2 On the first point, early engagement would have identified the strength of feeling in support of the provision of a local service and the anticipated practical difficulties for families in providing respite outside the council area. That is not to say that it would of necessity have made the recommendation to the Council a different one but this view would have been available prior to the decision being made at the budget meeting.
- 5.3 On the second point, the decision taken in February 2015 was part of the provisional budget for 2016/17. But of necessity, to deliver savings in that financial year action was required during 2015/16. This was reflected in the Council's decision to instruct Chief Officers to give effect to the service delivery proposals contained within the budget report (including those for 16/17). In addition, the decision was one which was subject to consideration in light of completing the EPIA process, including consultation. It is clear that there were competing understandings of the status of the decision taken in February 2015.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is asked to note the report.

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HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK ADULT SERVICES

Date: 27 January 2016

Contact Name: Nikki Harvey

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

FALKIRK COUNCIL

SUBJECT: SOCIAL WORK CHILDREN & FAMILIES BUDGET UPDATE
MEETING: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE: 4 FEBRUARY 2016
AUTHOR: DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A report was presented to the Scrutiny Committee in October 2015, providing information on the budget overspend in Social Work Children & Families service for the financial year 2014/15.
- 1.2 The October report also outlined the actions being taken to monitor expenditure in the current financial year. This report seeks to provide an update on progress.
- 1.3 The October 2015 report highlighted a projected overspend of £1.77 million at the end of July 2014. Despite diligent management and monitoring, this rose to £2.784 million by 31 March 2015, a variance of 13.6% against the allocated budget.

2. BUDGET EXPENDITURE 1 APRIL 2015 TO 31 DECEMBER 2015

- 2.1 The main pressures on the budget were reported to the Executive by the Director of Social Work on 30 September 2014. In addition, a comprehensive report on budget pressures in Social Work was included as an appendix to the Revenue Budget Framework 2015/16 – 2017/18.
- 2.2 The Children & Families Social Work budget for 2015/16 is now £20.939 million. Members will note that the October 2015 report to Committee indicated that the 2015/16 budget figure was £21.475 million. This was correct at that point in time. The reduction is due to the removal of departmental admin and Capital charge budget. The projected outturn as at 31 December 2015 is an overspend of £1.445 million, a variance of 6.9% against the allocated budget.

The budget overspend directly relates to additional expenditure being incurred due to increases in the number of children who require to be looked after away from home and the complexity of the needs they present.

The main areas of overspend continue to be related to the purchasing of external placements (mainly residential care and fostering).

2.3 **Main Pressure Areas 2015/16**

Type of Placement	Budget £'000	Projection £'000	Variance £'000	% Variance £'000
Residential Schools – joint funded	2,254	2,212	-42	-2
External Residential Care	3,474	3,870	396	11
Fostering (Falkirk Council)	1,594	1,779	185	12
External Fostering	942	1,762	820	87
TOTAL	8,264	9,623	1,359	

2.4 **Residential School Placements**

In total, 38 young people have been placed in residential schools between 1 April 2015 and 31 December 2015. As at 31 December, there were 19 young people in residential schools and 2 in secure. NHS FV contributes funding to 3 of the above placements due to the complex and health care needs of the children placed. Weekly costs for residential school placements vary considerably, with the cheapest being £1,886 per child per week and the most expensive being £5,250 per child per week.

2.5 **External Residential Care Placements**

38 young people in total have been in external residential care placements from April 2015. As at 31 December 2015, there were 24 young people in external placements.

The costs vary from £2,520 per child per week to £3,745. The average placement cost is £3,055.

2.6 **Foster Care Provision**

Foster carers are paid a fee of either £60, £100 or £150 per child per week in relation to providing a fostering service and the weekly amount of this is dependent on their skill level. They also receive an age related allowance per child per week related to caring for individual children. The age related allowances are:-

0 – 4 £137.18 per week
5 – 10 £156.26 per week
11 – 15 £194.53 per week
16+ £226.87 per week

The Council currently has 60 registered foster carers and 12 short break carers for children with disability. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 set an upper limit of 3 unrelated placements per fostering family.

As at 31 December 2015 there were 101 young people placed with Falkirk foster carers, 2 young people with supported carers and one in a board and lodgings placement.

- 2.7 There have been 46 placements in total with external foster carers since 1 April 2015.

As at 31 December 2015, there were a total of 39 young people in these placements. Of these, the Council holds Permanence Orders for 33 of them (4 with authority to adopt). This would indicate that they are in **long-term** stable placements and certainly means that they will not be going home, will remain in care and the Council, as their corporate parent, has the responsibility to care for them. As a consequence, it is therefore not feasible to reduce the overspend against this budget line. It would be more financially realistic to set a mainstream budget for this as many of these children are likely to remain in placement until age 19.

2.8 **Kinship Care Payments**

Members will recall in 2014 the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) challenge to Councils in relation to inequity of allowances to kinship carers of looked after children, with the Council having to revise its policy to avoid judicial review.

From 1 April 2015, we incrementally moved to undertaking financial assessments of current kinship carers and all new kinship carers of looked after children to move them on to the same rate of age related allowances paid to foster carers (outlined at 2.6). At the moment, we have 34 eligible kinship carers with an estimated increased cost (based on mid-range allowance minus child benefit) of £72,000 part year costs to the 2015/16 budget. Scottish Government part year funding of £52,000 has been provided for 2015/16.

- 2.9 In reaching agreement in relation to parity of allowance to kinship carers of looked after children, the Scottish Government announced in Autumn 2015 that the equivalent of fostering rates should also apply to certain carers with a Section 11 Residence Order. Clarity on the criteria for this is anticipated by end January/early February 2016. This will have significant implications financially for the Council.

The criteria will require payment of fostering equivalent allowances at minimum to carers with Section 11 Orders where the child was looked after immediately prior to the granting of the Section 11 Order, but may extend well beyond this to carers with whom the service has had limited or no previous involvement. Payments are required to be back-dated to 1 October 2015. No payments have yet been made as we await the announcement from the Scottish Government.

73 carers with Section 11 Orders are currently supported financially by the Council at a rate of £50 per week per child. For October 2015 – March 2016, additional funding from the Scottish Government means that, if carers qualify for child benefit and child tax credit, the additional funding of £107,030 should cover the increased costs of parity of allowance. If only eligible for child benefit, there will be a maximum shortfall of approximately £102,820. Any extension of eligibility will increase these costs.

Following the clarification of eligibility, a further report will be provided to Members on this matter.

3. CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

- 3.1 Table 1 below provides comparator figures for children looked after away from home for the last 4 years. It shows the sharp increase in numbers throughout 2014, continuing throughout 2015.

Table 1

Falkirk Council Number of Children Looked After Away from Home

	Total on LAAFH Register as at			
	2012	2013	2014	2015
January	211	209	227	249
February	207	213	229	252
March	204	219	228	252
April	208	227	228	251
May	214	225	227	248
June	210	228	236	236
July	214	222	247	240
August	218	216	248	241
September	215	223	246	247
October	212	226	248	244
November	210	223	257	246
December	211	224	256	246

3.2 Table 2 below provides comparator figures for looked after children rate per 1000 of population under 18.

These figures were published on 31 March 2015 by the Scottish Government and relate to Children's Social Work statistics for Scotland for 2013/14. They are based on an annual CLAS (Children Looked After statistics) return made by all Local Authorities as at 31 July each year.

It is worth noting that the percentage rate is lower than the national average and compares favourably with our comparator Local Authorities. We compare less favourably in having more children looked after away from home in residential care/schools than in foster care.

Table 2
Looked After Children - Falkirk v Scotland & Comparator Local Authorities

			HMIE Comparator LAs @ 31/07/14					Other Neighbouring LAs @ 31/07/14			
	Scotland @ 31/07/14	FALKIRK @ 31/07/14	South Lanarkshire	Fife	Clacks	Moray	Angus	Stirling	North Lanarkshire	West Lothian	FALKIRK @ 31/07/15
Number of Children Looked After	15,580	370	595	952	184	213	272	233	706	415	364
<i>Rate per 1,000 <18 population</i>	15.1	11.6	9.6	13.1	17.9	11.2	12.1	12.9	31.2	18.4	11.4
Number of Children Looked After At Home (with parents)	4,144	114	212	123	52	46	92	67	282	125	118
<i>Rate per 1000 <18 population</i>	4.0	3.6	3.4	1.7	5.0	2.4	4.1	3.7	12.5	5.5	3.7
Number of Children Looked After Away From Home	11,436	256	383	829	132	167	180	166	424	290	246
<i>Rate per 1000 < 18 population</i>	11.1	8.0	6.2	11.4	12.8	8.8	8.0	9.2	18.8	12.8	7.7

3.3 Table 3 below provides comparator budget figures for children looked after in residential and community settings for 2013/14.

These figures are collected nationally by the Improvement Service as part of the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. Again it is worth noting that Falkirk's spend on both residential and community settings is below the national average and compares favourably with our comparator authorities.

Table 3
LGBF Indicators - Falkirk v Comparator Local Authorities 2013/14

	Scotland	FALKIRK	HMIE Comparator LAs					Other Neighbouring LAs		
			South Lanarkshire	Fife	Clacks	Moray	Angus	Stirling	North Lanarkshire	West Lothian
The Gross Cost of "Children Looked After" in Residential Based Services per Child per Week	£3,098.31	£2,507.14	£2,623.63	£2,962.82	£2,426.92	£4,698.72	£4,612.82	£2,501.28	£3,445.51	£2,576.54
<i>Rank</i>		10	13	16	6	30	29	8	21	12
The Gross Cost of "Children Looked After" in a Community Setting per Child per Week	£264.83	£225.06	£179.66	£329.41	£289.71	£237.94	£305.73	£211.54	£117.42	£218.65
<i>Rank</i>		14	6	26	21	16	23	9	2	12

- 3.4 Assessment of need in relation to children and young people is based on robust risk assessment and risk management. The number of young people who require to be accommodated at any one time is highly variable as well as unpredictable. This is also influenced by the legislative decisions taken both by the Children's Hearing and the Sheriff Court, which the local authority is then required to implement or be faced with the possibility of an Enforcement Notice, thereby creating potentially unacceptable risks to individual children and/or reputational risk to the Council.

Consequently, this leads to financial volatility.

- 3.5 Work is ongoing to interrogate the performance management data to identify themes/patterns of characteristics in relation to the young people who are looked after away from home.

- 3.6 To date, we know that the following characteristics are prevalent:-

- parental drug and alcohol misuse
- parental mental health issues
- child protection issues (physical, emotional abuse and neglect)
- domestic violence
- self-harming behaviour of young people themselves
- drug and alcohol use by young people themselves
- risks to self and others

4. ACTIONS BEING TAKEN TO MANAGE THE BUDGET

- 4.1 There continues to be a real challenge to constrain expenditure, meeting demanding service efficiency targets whilst protecting both individual children and any potential reputational risks to the Council.

- 4.2 The contract with Care Visions for Westside has now been increased from 4 to 5 beds, effective from **9 July 2015** at a contract rate per bed per week of £2,750 compared to an average weekly cost of £3,055 for external provision.

- 4.3 We previously spot-purchased 2 placements from FTS at a cost of £2,975 per week. We now have a contract in place with them to purchase 6 out of their 8 beds at a weekly cost of £2,870. This has therefore provided savings on the 2 spot purchased beds from **2 November 2015**. It also enabled us to bring 3 young people back from more expensive external residential placements and accommodate a foster placement breakdown locally.

- 4.4 We are negotiating with Care Visions to potentially contract with them to provide a further 3 - 4 bedded unit.

- 4.5 We are due to run a foster carer recruitment campaign in March. Consequently, we will ask Payroll to include a message in all Council employee payslips in February, hopefully to create interest.

An article from an existing foster carer is also being put forward for inclusion in the Falkirk Council News, again to generate awareness and interest.

4.6 The Council contract with external foster carers is being reviewed. We have asked providers to give us a reduced rate for sibling and long-term placements. All but one of the 8 providers have agreed to do this. Work to progress the new contract is underway.

4.7 The integration of Social Work Children & Families service with Education into an integrated Children's Service brings opportunities to reduce duplication and transformation of current services in our approach to service delivery. The future focus has to be on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Plans are being progressed to develop a co-ordinated Family Support Service to include both early intervention and targeted services, thus providing a greater focus on prevention in relation to young people becoming looked after.

A manager from Social Work is to be seconded to the Mariner Service as a test of change to assist with bringing more young people back to Falkirk from external provision and allowing them to access local education. The pending relocation of the Mariner Service from Weedingshall to the former Focus School property in Laurieston also supports the Service in trying to increase the level and availability of provision within Falkirk.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Social Work Children & Families service continues to face a difficult and challenging time, particularly in light of the financial implications of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 as well as the volatility of the demand for placements. Within the newly formed Children's Service, we will be reviewing working practices and seeking transformational change to address these issues. However, the change process will take time and dedicated resources to take this forward.

5.2 In the meantime, the Senior Leadership Team within Children's Services will continue to robustly monitor expenditure on a regular basis.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1 The Committee is invited to note the progress made to date.

.....
Robert Naylor
Director of Children's Services
Contact Tel No: 504686

BACKGROUND PAPERS

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: TENANT & CUSTOMER PARTICIPATION STRATEGY 2016-19
Meeting: EXECUTIVE - HOUSING
Date: 23 FEBRUARY 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline our three year strategy for ensuring tenants and other customers are consulted and can participate in decision making in relation to housing services. It outlines our legal obligations; how customers have participated in developing this strategy and updates Members on the achievements of the previous participation strategy. Successful tenant participation delivers benefits for staff, landlords and tenants creating a culture of trust, respect and partnership.

2. BACKGROUND

Duties to Consult

- 2.1 Participation is about our tenants influencing the decisions made about the service and management of their homes and neighbourhood.
- 2.2 The Council's duties to consult with tenants and enable them to participate in the running of the service are contained in the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. These are:
1. To consult affected tenants on any proposed increases in rent or other charges payable under the tenancy; to have regard to their views and to provide 4 weeks' notice of any increase;
 2. To publish a Tenant Participation Strategy containing an assessment of resources;
 3. To publish a list of Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs);
 4. To notify tenants and RTO's of any proposals that would significantly affect tenants, explaining the likely effect, to give them reasonable timescales to respond and to have regard to the views of tenants or other organisations responding to the consultation. This includes proposals relating to policy on housing management, repairs, maintenance; standards of service; and the tenant participation strategy.

Regulatory Standards

- 2.3 The Council's regulatory requirements in terms of standards and outcomes are also contained in the Scottish Social Housing Charter, introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010. The Charter sets out the 14 outcomes that all landlords are measured against on an annual basis – this is called the Annual Return on the Charter. The emphasis of the Charter is on tenants scrutinising the performance of our services and governance. The Charter outlines the "Customer/Landlord Relationship" requirements as follows:

- Equalities- every tenant and other customer have their individual needs recognised, are treated fairly and with respect, and receive fair access to housing and housing services.
 - Communication – tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.
 - Participation – tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord’s decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.
- 2.4 These requirements are addressed in the draft Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy for 2016-2019 (Appendix 1). It also seeks to build on the good practice implemented as a result of the 2013-2016 strategy, which was approved by Housing & Social Care Committee on 6 November 2012; and to work in tandem with the overarching corporate community participation requirements set out in Falkirk Council’s ‘Have Your Say: A Plan for Local Involvement’ and the forthcoming Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE 2013-2016 STRATEGY

- 3.1 The 2013-16 Tenant & Resident Participation Strategy was successful in enabling customers to influence our service in a range of ways. We have gained external recognition for some of the excellent work that has taken place as a result of tenants and other customers’ input. Highlights include:
- The tenants’ magazine, ‘**Tenant Talk**’ receiving the Gold Award for Best External Publication at the Scottish Pride Awards in 2014. The Council’s internal Communications unit were instrumental to this success and they continue to work in partnership with tenants and housing staff on ‘Tenant Talk’ and a wide range of other reports and communication methods.
 - **Charter Chat** events to promote the Scottish Social Housing Charter and public performance reporting being highlighted as good practice by the Scottish Housing Regulator.
 - The first **Annual Report to Tenants** 2014 being used by the Scottish Housing Regulator as a good example of what the report should look like.
 - Examples of good practice by Falkirk Council in relation to **consultation with gypsy/travellers**, recognised in the Scottish Housing Regulator in their ‘Report on Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland – A Thematic Enquiry’ 2015
- 3.2 A Customer Led Inspection of the Estate Management aspects of Housing Services resulted in the publication of an action plan in 2015 to make services more customer-focused. The Tenants’ & Residents’ Forum are continuing to monitor progress against the actions agreed. Once fully implemented, our estate management service quality will better reflect the priorities of our tenants and other customers. This, coupled with the introduction of the tenants & residents’ Scrutiny Panel, which has so far scrutinised repairs satisfaction rates, puts the Council in a good position to involve customers in self-assessment, in keeping with the regulatory framework introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010.

4. PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING THE 2016-19 STRATEGY

- 4.1 Extensive consultation has taken place on the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019) (Appendix 1). This included independent research involving 1,034 telephone surveys in 2014/15, discussions with the Tenants' & Residents' Forum, consultation with our 13 Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations and a general opportunity to provide views by email, telephone or letter, advertised in the tenants' magazine, 'Tenant Talk'.
- 4.2 From the feedback provided through the consultation period, it is clear that the majority of tenants and customers are happy to impart or exchange information through letters, magazines, leaflets, websites etc. They are also willing to be involved for a short period by making comments or complaints, completing short surveys or questionnaires or attend 'one-off' events. However, when more time or commitment is required, our tenants and customers are less likely to be involved, mainly because of work/family commitments or for health reasons. Forums, groups, regular meetings and scrutiny exercises are less popular in terms of customer involvement but still have a vital role for tenants and customers. For these reasons, the new strategy broadens the scope for involvement and will capture a broader range of tenant/customer views.

The draft strategy was approved by the Tenants & Residents Forum at their meeting on 26 August 2015. The draft Action Plan was reviewed by the Tenants & Residents Forum in December 2015 and issued to Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations, as well as staff for comments. The Strategy and Action Plan attached reflect the feedback from these processes.

5. AIMS OF THE 2016 – 2019 STRATEGY

- 5.1 The 2016-19 Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy aims to ensure the Council complies with its legal obligations and gives tenants and other customers a bigger say in how housing services are run.
- 5.2 The draft Housing Participation Action Plan (Appendix 2) outlines the target dates and milestones to be achieved, and the Tenants & Residents Forum will monitor our delivery against the agreed actions.
- 5.3 The Housing Participation Action Plan is based around the three regulatory standards outlined at 2.2 in terms of how we will:
- Recognise individual needs and ensure all customers receive fair access to housing services (Equalities)
 - Communicate more effectively (Communication)
 - Enable tenants and other customers to participate in setting housing services' priorities, policies and service standards (Participation)

6. THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

6.1 The benefits of participation are for our service users and staff in terms of:

- Higher customer satisfaction because we design services to reflect customer priorities
- Fewer customer complaints because we listen and learn from feedback
- Higher staff satisfaction because we get better feedback from customers
- Higher quality services because our customers can hold us to account

7. RESOURCES FOR THE 2016-2019 PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

7.1 The resources needed to implement the Tenant & Customer Participation strategy are required by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to be assessed and incorporated into the strategy itself. As with previous strategies, resources will be available from a variety of budgets depending on the area of consultation or participation are as follows:

Dedicated Staff (2FTE):	£65k
Other Resource Budget (See Resource Summary table below)	£125k
Total Budget	£190k

7.2 The proposed resources are in line with Falkirk Council's 2015/16 budget for tenant and resident participation which is benchmarked annually with other social landlords. Scotland's Housing Network (SHN) benchmark data on tenant participation covers resource budgets in recognition that generic, as well as dedicated staff deliver participation strategies. Our proposed annual resource budget is equivalent to £7.69 per tenant household (based on an average of 16,250 tenant households). This is close to the SHN's average spend per tenant in Scotland for 2014/15 of £7.65 per year.

Resource Summary	
Equalities	Training for staff Training for tenants & customers Customer Surveys and associated publications
Communication	Annual Performance Report to Tenants Charter Chat Events 3 Editions of Tenant Talk per year Electronic Information Posters & Flyers Promotional Materials
Participation	Tenants & Residents Forum Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations Point of View Consultation Register Scrutiny Panel Editorial Panel Housing Asset Management Plan Sub-Group Variety of Short Term Sub Groups Make a Difference Project Awards Exhibitions

- 7.3 In addition, housing staff with generic functions such as Neighbourhood Officers will be instrumental in the delivery of the strategy. The Council's Central Communications Unit will also be instrumental to the delivery of communications elements of the strategy in partnership with tenants and housing staff. The participation action plan will therefore be incorporated into the Housing Services Plan, Divisional Team plans and individual work plans on an annual basis.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Tenants and other customers have helped formulate a new strategy to give them a greater influence on the way housing services are delivered. The strategy and action plan will ensure we meet our legal obligation to consult tenants on matters affecting them and design services that reflect their priorities, an issue of particular importance during challenging financial times. The strategy and action plan will be challenging to deliver but if successful will result in better quality services to tenants and other customers using the homeless and access to housing services.

9. RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is recommended that Executive approves the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy 2016-19 (Appendix 1) and associated Action Plan (Appendix 2).

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

Date: 11 February 2016

Ref: AAB230216 – Tenant Customer & Participation Strategy

Contact Name: Kenny Gillespie / Lorna Dunsmore

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report to Housing & Social Care Committee: Tenant & Resident Participation Strategy, 6 November 2012

LIST OF APPENDICES

1. Appendix 1 - Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019)
2. Appendix 2 - Action Plan for the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy 2016-19

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 590851 and ask for Lorna Dunsmore or Alan Christie.

**Housing Services
Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy**

2016 – 2019

A Strategy for Partnership, Performance & Improvement

Contents *(Include Page Numbers)*

- Foreword
- Our Vision
- Introduction: What is participation and how did we develop our strategy?
- Why do we need a participation strategy and what are the benefits?
- Aims & Objectives
- Consultation methods and minimum timescales
- How do we relate to our customers?
- How will we keep our customers informed and how do our customers access services and information?
- How do our customers engage with the Housing Service?
- How can our customers participate in the Housing Service?
- How can our customers scrutinise the Housing Service and its performance?
- What will the Housing Service do to make sure tenants and other customers know they can be involved?
- How will the Housing Service make sure everyone is included and treated equally?
- How will the Housing Service remove barriers that prevent customers being involved in participation and scrutiny?
- Statement of Resources
- Monitoring & Reviewing the Strategy
- Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

- Appendix 1: Action Plan for the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy 2016 - 2019

(Insert Photograph)

Foreword

Welcome to Falkirk Council Housing Services' strategy for involving our tenants and other customers in improving the services we provide. This strategy has been written following extensive consultation with our tenants and residents and has been approved by our Tenants & Residents Forum, comprised of our local Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations and individual tenants and residents.

We recognise that informing our customers and listening to their views is an essential part of shaping housing services to meet our customers' needs and aspirations. A key part of this strategy is to provide more opportunities for our customers to express their views in a way that suits them.

The Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019) is focusing on how we communicate with our customers and how they communicate with us. We are committed to providing tenants and other customers' greater opportunities to influence the services they receive and to reflect their priorities and needs.

Our Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy has been written with our customers' views in mind, to ensure that we work more closely and more effectively together to improve housing services.

We wish to encourage people to participate in the activities of Falkirk Council's Housing Services in a way that suits them and hope that this Strategy document will provide a framework to make that happen.

Jennifer Litts
Head of Housing

Our Vision

Housing Service's vision for participation is one of *'sharing information with our customers in a variety of ways; providing opportunities for our customers to express their views in a way that suits them; listening and responding to our customers views to improve the services we provide and allowing our customers to scrutinise our performance.'*

Falkirk Council's Corporate Plan 2014 – 2017 sets out our overarching vision of becoming *'The Place to be in the 21st Century'*. Tenant and customer participation promotes the high quality services necessary to achieve that vision, through our core values of *Public Service, Performance* and *Partnership*.

Introduction

What is Participation?

‘Participation’ is about how we communicate with our tenants and other customers. It is also about what opportunities our customers have to provide feedback and express their views; how our customers can be actively involved in helping shape services and how they can scrutinise our performance, all with a view to improving services.

How did we develop this strategy?

Falkirk Council’s Housing Service has had a strong track record of customer participation. The first Tenant Participation Strategy was introduced in 2002. A Tenant Involvement Group was set up to review the strategy in 2008. This group was instrumental in forming and monitoring the next Tenant Participation Strategy with the support and assistance of the council’s Tenant Participation Service and staff from across the Housing Service including:

- Housing Strategy & Development
- Housing Investment
- Housing Maintenance & Repairs
- Housing Allocations
- Neighbourhood Offices

The 2016-2019 strategy has been developed by carrying out a large-scale telephone survey of 1,034 tenants to ask them what their preferred methods of engagement are, what barriers they face when trying to participate and how satisfied or dissatisfied they feel about the opportunities to participate. We have also asked the Tenants & Residents Forum and our 13 Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations what they think about the strategy. In addition we sought feedback from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) on how the strategy could be improved. Finally, we asked our staff who will be involved in delivering the strategy what they thought.

We have listened to what tenants’ and other customers’ have told us to develop this strategy so we can offer effective, practical methods of providing our customers with information and ways to communicate with us; suitable methods for our customers to engage with us; a variety of options for customers to participate at a level, and in a manner, that suits them and practical ways of scrutinising our performance. The strategy also sets out the mechanisms we have put in place, and the resources that are available, to support the strategy to make sure it is successful.

This strategy builds on the success of previous Tenant & Resident Participation strategies. It recognises the need to work with other customers of the Housing Service who are not necessarily tenants of the council as the previous Tenant & Resident Participation Strategy (2013 – 2016) acknowledges, and as introduced with the Scottish Social Housing Charter. ‘Other customers’ include (but are not limited to) Travelling Persons’, Homeless People, Factored Owners and Applicants for Housing.

It extends to people who are affected by our Estate Management Services or share common areas with our tenants and those people affected by antisocial behaviour. It also recognises that to improve services based on customers' experiences of the services we offer, there is a need to build a strong lasting, relationship through the stages of communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny.

The progress made in the Housing Service from following previous tenant participation strategies include:

- Introducing a Tenants' & Residents' Forum with established Terms of Reference to oversee all communication, engagement, participation, and scrutiny activities and hold the council to account for working effectively with its customers, taking account of their views and shaping services accordingly
- Supporting customers to set up Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations (RTOs) throughout the Falkirk Council area
- Introducing a Partnership Agreement with Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations
- Providing financial incentives to our Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations (and those areas where there were no RTOs) to come up with a project in their community that would make a difference
- Setting up a Project Award Panel to encourage community engagement and participation at a local level and strengthen Housing Service's relationship with RTOs
- Establishing a regular Housing Service publication containing housing information for all tenants and customers
- Setting up an Editorial Panel made up of customer representatives to review and input to Housing Service's publications
- Supporting Customer Led Inspections of the Repairs & Maintenance Service in 2011 and the Estate Management Services in 2013/14
- Hosting various events, conferences and exhibitions
- Carrying out regular Tenant Satisfaction Surveys (both transactional and large-scale) to monitor and evaluate our customers' experiences of the services they receive
- Conducting a variety of public relations activities to encourage engagement, participation and scrutiny

Why do we need a participation strategy?

Outcomes

This participation strategy is important because it will help deliver the following outcomes:

- Equalities: *‘Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.’*
- Communication: *‘Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.’*
- Participation: *‘Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate and influence their landlords’ decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.’*

These outcomes are part of the [Scottish Social Housing Charter](#) which states clearly what tenants and other customers can expect from social landlords, to help them hold landlords to account. This was introduced by the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 which also enhanced the role of tenants and customers in regulating social landlords. We publish an [Annual Landlord Report to Tenants](#) on our website showing our performance against Charter indicators selected by the Tenants & Residents’ Forum.

Tenants’ Rights to Consultation

The Council’s duties to consult with tenants and enable them to participate in the running of the service are:

1. To consult affected tenants on any proposed increases in rent or other charges payable under the tenancy; to have regard to their views and to provide 4 weeks’ notice of any increase;
2. To publish a Tenant Participation Strategy containing an assessment of resources;
3. To publish a list of Registered Tenant Organisations (RTOs);
4. To notify tenants and RTO’s of any proposals that would significantly affect tenants, explaining the likely effect, to give them reasonable timescales to respond and to have regard to the views of tenants or other organisations responding to the consultation. This includes proposals relating to policy on housing management, repairs, maintenance, standards of service, the tenant participation strategy and any stock transfer resulting in a change of landlord.

These obligations are contained within the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001.

It is important that Housing Services’ Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019) links in, and works with, national plans and strategies and those that Falkirk Council already has in place. These links will enable a joined-up approach to how services are delivered across the whole Falkirk Council area and avoid

duplication or conflict. This strategy has been formulated taking account of tenants and other customers' views, as well as the following plans, strategies and documents:

National Influences:

- [Digital Participation: A National Framework, Scottish Government, 2014](#)
- [Frontline Futures: New Era, Changing Role for Housing Officers, Chartered Institute of Housing 2014](#)
- [Guidance on Tenant Participation, Scottish Government, 2002](#)
- [National Standards for Community Engagement Review, Scottish Community Development Centre, 2015](#)
- [Participation Statement, Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland](#)
- [Scottish Social Housing Charter, Scottish Government, 2012](#)
- [The Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)
- [The Freedom of Information \(Scotland\) Act 2002](#)
- [The Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2001](#)
- [The Housing \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)

Falkirk Council Strategies, Plans and Reports

- [Annual Landlord Report to Tenants](#)
- [Falkirk Council Corporate Plan 2012 – 2017: One Council One Plan](#)
- [Falkirk Council Local Development Plan \(Statement of Conformity with Participation\) 2014](#)
- [Falkirk Integrated Strategic Plan 2016-2019](#)
- [Have Your Say: Plan for Local Involvement, 2014](#)
- Learning to Achieve – A Strategy for Raising Achievement, Education
- [Local Housing Strategy 2011 - 2016](#)
- Service Plan, Corporate & Neighbourhood Services (2015 – 2018)
- [Single Outcome Agreement, Falkirk Council](#)

What are the benefits of participation?

There are clear benefits of participation for our tenants, other customers of the housing service and our staff. These relate to:

- Higher customer satisfaction because we design services to reflect customer priorities
- Fewer customer complaints because we listen and learn from feedback
- Higher staff satisfaction because we get better feedback from customers
- Higher quality services because our customers can hold us to account

Aims of the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy 2016- 2019

This strategy aims to:

- Raise awareness of tenant participation through improved communication to tenants and tenants & residents organisations
- Increase the opportunities for tenants and other customers to influence the delivery of housing services and scrutinise performance
- Comply with the statutory requirements of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001, the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 and the proposed Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Enable the Council to achieve effective outcomes for our tenants and other customers, as outlined in the Scottish Social Housing Charter
- Enable the Council to achieve its strategic outcomes as outlined in Falkirk Council's Single Outcome Agreement, Corporate Plan, Local Housing Strategy and strategy for community engagement
- Make sure the strategy is able to adapt to the changing needs of, and issues raised by, our tenants and other customers
- Continually develop and improve customer relations, including communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny across a broad range of housing and housing-related services

Objectives

We recognise that to meet the aims of this Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy then we must also meet the following objectives:

- Make sure information about the Housing Service is what our tenants and other customers are looking for, available in formats that meet their needs and accessible to them using methods they feel comfortable with
- Consult with our tenants and other customers on issues that are most important to them, in ways that are most effective for them
- Offer a wide range of options for tenants and other customers to communicate, engage, participate and scrutinise in a way, and at a level, that suits them
- Promote the values of good customer relations to staff at all levels within the Housing Service and amongst elected members, tenants and other customers
- Offer and agree levels of support and resources for tenants' and residents' groups
- Review and monitor Housing Service's Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy on a regular basis in consultation with our tenants and other customers
- Increase the number of democratically elected Tenant & Resident Organisations in the Falkirk Council area, in particular those achieving Registered Tenant Organisation (RTO) status.

The *Action Plan for the Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy 2016 – 2019* (**Appendix 1**) provides full details of how we will meet the aims and objectives of this strategy including target timescales.

Consultation Methods and Minimum Timescales

Methods – we will use the right methods of engagement in each situation and ensure that timescales are long enough for people to participate effectively.

What this means in practice:

- We will try to use the most appropriate method for each consultation or engagement exercise. In some situations face to face discussion is essential, whilst in other situations, a survey may be the only practical way to get the views of a lot of people.
- We will always allow at least 6 weeks when we are asking community groups including Registered Tenant & Resident Organisations (RTO's) to respond to a consultation or attend a consultation event. This is because we realise that community groups usually only meet once a month, so need 6 weeks' notice to discuss things at their meetings.
- We will always allow at least 3 weeks' notice when we are asking individual community members to respond to a consultation or attend a consultation event.

This approach is consistent with Falkirk Council's corporate approach outlined in [Have Your Say: Plan for Local Involvement, 2014](#).

How do we relate to our customers?

Every tenant and other customer should have their individual needs recognised, be treated fairly and with respect, and receive fair access to housing and housing services.

They should also find it easy to communicate with us and get the information they need about Falkirk Council as their landlord, how and why we make decisions and the services we provide.

It is important to us that our tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

The information we gathered from a survey of 1,034 of our tenants has told us that their preferred methods of communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny were:

COMMUNICATION ('the imparting or exchanging of information'*)

We asked: *'How would you prefer the council to keep you informed about general issues such as their services or decisions or events?'*

The following information tells us how this question was answered in order of preference, starting with the most popular, and the percentage of people who said this was their preferred method:

- * Magazine (77% of people who responded)
- * Personal letters (77% of people who responded)
- * Information leaflets (48% of people who responded)
- * Posters & flyers (27% of people who responded)
- * Annual Performance Report (23% of people who responded)
- * Email (19% of people who responded)
- * Information Screens at One Stop Shops/DVD (17% of people who responded)
- * Website (17% of people who responded)
- * Text (11% of people who responded)
- * Telephone (3% of people who responded)

Other forms of general communication we use that are available, but we did not ask about in the survey, include:

- * New Tenancy Packs
- * One Stop Shop Portals

ENGAGEMENT ('to begin an action with' or 'employ for a short period'*)

We asked: *'Are you aware of the following ways in which you could become involved in Falkirk Council's Housing Services to improve their services?'* and *'Whether or not you have participated in these activities in the past, would you be interested in participating in any of these in the future to help the council improve their housing services?'*

* Dictionary definition from Collins English Dictionary: 21st Century Edition.

The following information tells us how these questions were answered in order of preference, starting with the most popular, and the percentage of people who said this was their preferred method of engagement:

- * Tenant Satisfaction Surveys: Large Scale (60% of people who responded)
- * Day-to-day Customer Satisfaction Surveys: Transactional (58% of people who responded)
- * Comments Cards (41% of people who responded)
- * Face-to-face surveys (30% of people who responded)
- * Open Days & Exhibitions: i.e. Charter Chat Events etc (14% of people who responded)

Other forms of engagement that are used on a regular basis, but we did not ask about in the survey, include:

- * The New Tenancy Handbook
- * Making a Complaint
- * General Publicity (i.e. 'Inspector Tenant' logo/mascot, key-rings, balloons etc.)

PARTICIPATION ('to take part, be or become actively involved, or share in'*)

We asked: *'Are you aware of the following ways in which you could become involved in Falkirk Council's Housing Services to improve their services?'* and *'Whether or not you have participated in these activities in the past, would you be interested in participating in any of these in the future to help the council improve their housing services?'*

The following information tells us how these questions were answered in order of preference, starting with the most popular, and the percentage of people who said this was their preferred method of participating by becoming actively involved:

- * Estate Walkabouts (23% of people who responded)
- * Tenants' & Residents' Forum (18% of people who responded)
- * Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisation (16% of people who responded)
- * Sub-groups on specific subject areas (15% of people who responded)
- * Consultation Register: 'Point of View' (14% of people who responded)
- * Being on an Editorial Panel who comment on the content and publication of the 'Tenant Talk' magazine and other publications (9% of people who responded)

SCRUTINY ('close examination; a searching look'*)

- * Annual Landlord Report to Tenants [and other customers] (23% of people who responded)
- * Open Days and Exhibitions: i.e. Charter Chat events etc (14% of people who responded)
- * Scrutinising Housing Service's performance (11% of people who responded)

* Dictionary definition from Collins English Dictionary: 21st Century Edition.

How will we keep our customers informed and how do our customers access services and information?

Housing Services need to keep our customers informed and make sure our services and information are accessible to our tenants and other customers.

Information should also be consistent in terms of content and style so that our tenants and other customers receive clear information regardless which method of access they use. For example, if a customer picks up a leaflet on any given housing topic, the information they read should be consistent with our website and Tenants' Handbook.

To enable customer access to our services and information, Falkirk Council, including the Housing Service, will use the following methods:

- The Falkirk Council **Website** www.falkirk.gov.uk . On the website, our customers can find out about our policies, performance and other topical issues. They can also make a request for service, report a problem or pay a bill
- Falkirk Council's **Contact Centre** allows our customers to access services, including the Housing Service, by telephone, email or text relay (for hearing or speech-impaired customers) as a single point of contact
- **Falkirk Council News** is delivered regularly to every home in the Falkirk Council area and contains information about achievements, community events, local news as well as topical information on Housing Services
- There are currently seven **One Stop Shops** and/or **Neighbourhood Offices** spread across the Falkirk Council area to take services out to communities and make them more accessible to the people who use them. The Housing Service is one of the key services located in these local offices
- A **One Stop Shop** portal is located in the public area at each One Stop Shop and/or Neighbourhood Office. The portal enables tenants and other customers to access the Falkirk Council website and any other relevant information about council services
- **Plasma Screens** in each One Stop Shop and/or Neighbourhood Office display information on topical issues, performance and other useful information about community achievements, community events, local news and any other relevant information about the Housing Service
- **Information Leaflets** are available in the reception area of the each One Stop Shop and/or Neighbourhood Office. These leaflets contain useful information on various aspects of the Housing Service and the services we offer. Each leaflet includes information on how tenants and other customers can participate in, or scrutinise, each part of the service
- **Posters and Flyers** are displayed in One Stop Shops and/or Neighbourhood Offices to advertise particular events of interest

- A **Tenancy Agreement** and summary of the Tenancy Agreement is provided to each new tenant. This legal document outlines the tenants' rights & responsibilities and the Council's rights and responsibilities as a landlord. Section.8 of the Scottish Secure Tenancy Agreement outlines the tenants' rights to information and consultation
- Each new tenant is issued with a **New Tenancy Pack** with useful information about their home, their rights and responsibilities, the various services on offer to assist them in maintaining their home and other service providers who can assist tenants to enjoy their home
- Tenants are provided with a **Tenants' Handbook** that contains information to tenants on how to manage their home. For example, how to contact the Council and how to request a service, report a problem or pay a bill. It also contains information on how they can engage with, participate in, or scrutinise the Housing Service's performance
- The '**Tenant Talk' Magazine** is published on a regular basis throughout the year. This publication contains information on topical issues, Housing Services' performance, options for participation, feedback on consultations, community projects & events as well as promotional material on participation and scrutiny. The magazine also contains competitions, prizes, hints and tips etc. It is sent directly to each individual tenant, is available online and in the reception areas of Falkirk Council offices where the Housing Service has a presence. Copies are also sent to each Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisation, The Castings, YPeople Project and the Travelling Persons' Site
- **Personal Letters** sent to tenants and other customers include the sender's **office address** and **direct dial telephone number** so that tenants and other customers can contact officers direct if they wish
- **Email** correspondence from Housing Services' staff includes the responding officers' office address, direct dial telephone number and other contact information should our customers wish to communicate using another method
- Officers across the service have a **Voicemail** telephone facility so that customers can leave a message if the officer is not available
- On some occasions the Housing Service will use **text messaging** and **Twitter** to inform our customers of decisions or events
- Events hosted by the Housing Service are included in Falkirk Council's **Events Diary** on the council website
- To ensure inclusiveness in leaflets, literature, questionnaires and publications, both paper and electronic can be requested in **other languages and formats**

How do our customers engage with the Housing Service?

A key aim of this strategy is to *‘provide opportunities for our customers to express their views in a way that suits them’*.

It is clear from the survey carried out late 2014 (which included 1,034 of our tenants) that the majority of our customers are happy to engage using informal methods, or through methods that do not require a great deal of time or long-term commitment. In response to this, and based on the feedback from our tenants, the Housing Service will offer the following methods for our customers to engage:

- **Large scale tenant (and other customer) satisfaction surveys.** These consist of a large, representative random sample of our tenant/customer population who are asked a series of questions in a survey. The survey may vary in length depending on the amount of information to be gathered. The methodology used will largely depend on the sample size, target group, subject and questions asked.
- **Transactional day to day surveys.** These are short surveys that are completed at the end of a routine transaction. For example, the completion of a repair or improvement, end of a case or completion of a pilot. The information will be gathered at the end of the transaction and gauge the customer’s experience of the service(s) they received.
- We will continue to use **face to face surveys** where appropriate as a means of gathering information from our customers. These will consist of a series of questions asked directly to a customer in an interview style and face to face as the title states.
- **Postal surveys** will be used as transactional surveys and, depending on the subject for general surveys, be sent to the consultation register ‘Point of View’.
- Where appropriate, **online surveys** will be used as an option for those customers who have access to internet and/or do not wish to complete and post a paper survey.
- Falkirk Council’s **Complaints Handling Procedure** supports customers when they complain about the services they receive, including Housing Services. There are a variety of methods for making a complaint, which are logged and tracked to identify trends that can be used to influence change in policies, procedures and practices.

Customer comment cards will be available in the reception areas of One Stop Shops and /or Neighbourhood Office to encourage positive, negative or constructive comments from our customers on our services.

- We will use **promotional material and publicity** as a means of engaging with our customers and encouraging them to participate in the improvement and delivery of the Housing Service.

How can our customers participate in the Housing Service?

For those tenants and other customers who want to take part and be actively involved in shaping the Housing Service, we will offer a range of options for them to be involved in a way that suits them and at a level that they are comfortable with.

Taking account of the views expressed during the 2014 survey of 1,034 of our tenants we will make the following participation methods available to our customers:

- The **Tenants' & Residents' Forum** will be held regularly throughout the year and is open to any tenant, customer or member of the wider public who wishes to attend. The main purpose of the forum is to oversee implementation of this strategy and make sure that Falkirk Council's Housing Service fulfils its statutory obligation to consult with, and take account of, tenants and other customers' views. The forum has a key role in this strategy in terms of representing the views of customers on the Housing Service they receive.
- A variety of **short term subgroups** can be set up to provide feedback to consultations on particular areas of the service. These groups will be made up of customer volunteers. The size and frequency of these subgroups can vary depending on the subject and the extent of the consultation. Each subgroup provides feedback to the Tenants' & Residents' Forum. Each subgroup is open to anyone who may be interested in the subject, whether they are already actively involved or not, and will be advertised as such.
- Where a number of tenants and other customers want to set up their own local group, they can apply to form a **Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations (RTOs)**. RTOs have a statutory right to be consulted on issues that may affect them or the wider tenant population. There are currently 13 RTOs in the Falkirk Council area.
- For those customers who wish to express their views without attending a forum, group or meeting, there is a register of tenants and customers who wish to be consulted. This register is called **'Point of View'** and enables our customers to express their view from the comfort of their home by returning feedback on consultations sent to them. All postal surveys or feedback requests will be sent with a pre-paid envelope to encourage responses.
- Where appropriate or necessary, the Housing Service uses the council's **Citizens' Panel** on issues that require feedback from the wider customer base. Examples include the Local Housing Strategy, Estate Management Policy etc.
- The content and design of the 'Tenant Talk' magazine is approved by an **Editorial Panel** made up of tenants and other customers. The group also oversees information (including web content, leaflets, booklets etc) that the Housing Service produces to make sure it is easy to read and understand. A 'Tenant Approved' logo marks those leaflets that have been approved by the Editorial Panel and/or other customers.

- Influence on the **Housing Asset Management Plan (HAMP)** is, in the main, by a group of four tenants and residents who meet every three months with staff responsible for assets and investment to discuss management of the councils assets (i.e. capital investment programmes etc.) and proposed council programmes for building new homes for rent.
- Regular **Estate Walkabouts** are hosted by local One Stop Shops and/or Neighbourhood Offices. These Estate Walkabouts are open to anyone who lives locally, and gives our tenants and other customers the opportunity to meet with local officers and their partners to identify areas of concern on their estate. It also provides an opportunity for those who attend to offer suggestions on how these areas of concern can be addressed.

How can our customers scrutinise the Housing Service and its performance?

In general terms, to promote scrutiny the Housing Service will provide information on their performance on the Falkirk Council website, in 'Tenant Talk' magazine and on plasma screens in the One Stop Shops and/or Neighbourhood Offices throughout the year. Our annual performance will also be published on the Scottish Housing Regulator's website to enable comparisons to be drawn with other social rented sector landlords across Scotland.

In addition to these methods of reporting, we will also report on performance and support scrutiny in the following ways:

- Housing Service's **Landlord Report to Tenants** is published by the end of October each year. The report is written in consultation with our tenants and other customers who tell us what performance information they want in the report, and how they want the information presented.
- **Open days and exhibitions:** e.g. 'Charter Chat' events will be hosted periodically throughout the year and in various locations to allow our customers to view information on the services we provide under each of the Scottish Social Housing Charter headings. These exhibitions will allow customers to drop in when they can, view information, check out how the Housing Service is performing, ask questions, provide feedback and leave when they wish.
- A **scrutiny panel** made up of tenants and other customers was set up in early 2015. This group has gone through the Scottish Government's 'Stepping Up to Scrutiny' training programme. Each panel member is fully trained on scrutinising Housing Services' performance. The group not only check that the performance figures we report are correct, but also look for verification & evidence that supports the performance figures we report to the Scottish Housing Regulator. The group represents the views of our customers and offer suggestions on how services could be improved. It is open to any tenant or other customer who wishes to be involved. However, any new member must go through the 'Stepping Up to Scrutiny' training provided by Falkirk Council. Like every other subgroup, the scrutiny panel regularly update the Tenants' & Residents' Forum on their work.

What will the Housing Service do to make sure tenants and other customers know that they can be involved?

Our Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2013/14 showed that 34% of the 1004 people surveyed did not know they could have a say in the Housing Service they received. The more recent tenant survey on participation (December 2014) showed that 20% of the 1034 people who responded were not aware of opportunities to participate.

Throughout the duration of this strategy, the Housing Service will work closely with Falkirk Council's Communications & Marketing Team and the News & New Media Team to promote customer involvement and encourage our customers to have their say.

We will do this by using the information gathered from the large-scale tenants' surveys carried in 2013/14 and late 2014, and by setting up a joint working group of officers who will consider the following:

- Internet content.
- Colour, style, design and content of printed information provided by the Housing Service to ensure consistency across the service and information that is provided to our customers. For example, we will ensure that information is consistently managed so that our customers will receive the same clear message regardless of which method of communication they use (i.e. website, leaflet, booklet, poster, flyer etc).
- Promoting the range of ways for customers to get involved using a variety of methods. These methods will include a strap-line promoting involvement on all printed information provided by the Housing Service; using our 'Inspector Tenant' logo and mascot on literature (particularly literature relating to scrutiny) and at events; articles and adverts in the 'Tenant Talk' magazine; advertisements on the home page of the Falkirk Council website; a promotional DVD advert featuring customers who are already involved on the plasma screens in One Stop Shops and/or Neighbourhood Offices; posters and flyers at targeted locations; flyers and information posted directly to members of the 'Point of View' register; Twitter and any other appropriate means of raising awareness.
- Promotional materials including use of the 'Inspector Tenant' mascot at events, 'Inspector Tenant' key-rings to new tenants, balloons for children at events and any other appropriate promotional material.

How will the Housing Service make sure everyone is included and treated equally?

Falkirk Council believes that the diversity of its community is an essential part of its values.

The Equality Act 2010 promotes equality of opportunity, protects individuals from discrimination and adds a particular responsibility on public bodies to consider socio-economic inequalities.

The council is committed to achieving equality of access for all citizens and avoiding unlawful discrimination including direct, indirect, by perception or association or third party harassment. We recognise that people can be discriminated against for reasons including age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, or because someone is married or in a civil partnership. These characteristics are known as protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. Legislation also protects people being discriminated against on the grounds of unrelated criminal convictions, trade union activity, and long term unemployment or because they have AIDS or are HIV positive.

Falkirk Council's Housing Service is committed to:

- Promoting equality of opportunity for all persons
- Promoting a good and harmonious working environment in which all persons are treated with respect
- Preventing occurrences of unlawful direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Fulfilling all our legal obligations under the equality legislation and associated codes of practice
- Complying with our own Equal Opportunities Policy and associated policies
- Taking lawful, affirmative, or positive action where appropriate, and in accordance with legislation

The Housing Service is committed to fulfilling our statutory duty to promote equality and treat people with respect, fairness and equality across all areas of our business, including access to, and the provision of, quality housing, addressing homeless needs, managing our estates, tackling antisocial behaviour, providing support, managing rent arrears, working with other tenures and in our relationships with our tenants and other customers. We are also committed to tackling discrimination and harassment in all our activities and to ensuring that our services are accessible to everyone. Housing Services will encourage and provide active measures to ensure that all groups and individuals have equal access to communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny where they want to.

A commitment to equality and opportunity must also be reflected in the work and involvement of the Tenants' & Residents' Forum, the consultation register 'Point of View', Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations and any other group or sub groups formed as part of this strategy. These groups should also involve and represent all sections of the communities they are active in. Falkirk Council will encourage each of the groups involved with the Housing Service to adopt an inclusive approach towards involving minority groups, or groups that are at risk of being excluded, in the community they are active in. Groups or individuals involved with the Housing Service who act in a discriminatory or offensive way towards minority groups could be subject to removal from the involvement process.

How will the Housing Service remove barriers that prevent customers being involved through participation and scrutiny?

Falkirk Council wants everyone to have the opportunity to become involved in the services they receive. We know from the recent tenant survey on participation (conducted in December 2014), to which we received 1,034 responses that the main barriers to involvement are:

- Health/disability issues (31% of people who responded)
- Work commitments (28% of people who responded)
- Not aware of meetings/opportunities to participate (20% of people who responded)
- Childcare commitments (19% of people who responded)
- Not interested (16% of people who responded)
- Don't understand enough about the work of the Council's Housing Services (8% of people who responded)
- Lack of confidence in speaking up (4.5% of people who responded)
- Transport issues (1.5% of people who responded)

To show Housing Service's commitment to our relationship with our customers and to encourage their involvement, we will seek to overcome these barriers in the following ways:

- **Health/disability issues:** We will make information as accessible as possible and in various formats including large print or Braille for those who are visually impaired. Promotional DVDs will be available with subtitles for those who are hard of hearing or deaf. We recognise that some meeting venues may not be suitable for people with physical disabilities or impairments so we will hold meetings in venues that are accessible, secure and convenient. We will provide a wide range of options for people to become involved in a way that suits them; including options that mean they do not have to leave their home if they do not want to.
- **Work commitments:** As far as is reasonably possible we will arrange meeting and event times taking account of the needs and preferences of local communities and people who are invited to attend. We will provide a wide range of opportunities for customers to provide feedback at a time that is convenient to them and in a manner that suits them.
- **Not aware of meetings/opportunities to participate:** We will promote customer involvement and the variety of options available for involvement. This will be done in partnerships with the Council's Communications & Marketing Team, News & New Media Team and Housing Service's Communications Group.
- **Childcare commitments:** Where necessary, we will provide crèche facilities during meetings or events, or consider childminding allowances to enable people to attend meetings.

- **Not interested:** We will continue to promote the values and benefits of customer involvement.
- **Don't understand enough about the work of the Council's Housing Service:** We will raise awareness of the variety of services the Housing Service provides and provide information about what these services do.
- **Lack of confidence in speaking up:** We will provide training and support to give tenants and other customers the necessary knowledge to take part in discussions and/or provide comments.
- **Transport issues:** Where requested, we will provide transport for tenants and other customers to attend meetings and events arranged by the Housing Service, or offer financial assistance with transport costs.

Statement of Resources

We recognise that if we are to have a strong, sustainable relationship with our customers, the Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019) has to be properly resourced and supported. We will work with our partners in other services to join up budgets and share staff resources to meet common aims and objectives at a strategic and operational level.

A key requirement of this strategy is to carry out an assessment of the resources needed to enable good customer relations through communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny.

Falkirk Council's dedicated resource budget for Tenant & Resident Participation is approximately £7.69 per tenant household per year (based on an average of 16,250 tenants). This is close to the average spend per tenant in Scotland of £7.65 per year. (*Source: Scottish Housing Best Value Report 2014/15*).

The annual resources for delivering the strategy are drawn from a variety of housing services budgets and are summarised on the statement below:

<u>Resource Summary</u>	
Dedicated Staff (2 Full Time Equivalent):	£65, 000
<u>Other Budget (see resource summary table below):</u>	<u>£125, 000</u>
Total Budget	<u>£190, 000</u>
Equalities	Training for staff Training for tenants & customers Customer Surveys and associated publications
Communication	Annual Performance Report to Tenants Charter Chat Events 3 Editions of Tenant Talk per year Electronic Information Posters & Flyers Promotional Materials
Participation	Tenants & Residents Forum Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations Point of View Consultation Register Scrutiny Panel Editorial Panel Housing Asset Management Plan SubGroup Variety of Short Term SubGroups Make a Difference Project Awards Exhibitions

Staff with generic functions such as Neighbourhood Officers will be instrumental to the delivery of the strategy. The Council's central Communications unit will also be instrumental to the delivery of communications elements of the strategy in partnership with tenants and housing staff. The participation action plan will therefore be incorporated into the Housing Services Plan, Divisional Team plans and individual work plans on an annual basis.

The Statement of Resources includes two staff dedicated to the implementation and co-ordination of communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny across the service – The Community Participation Co-Ordinator and supporting officer. Other staff costs that are not reflected in the table include staff that carry out tenant and customer participation activities one a day-to-day basis as part of their generic role.

The Community Engagement Coordinator has a strategic role in managing and co-ordinating all tenant and resident participation activities including communication, engagement, participation and scrutiny. This post includes promoting and supporting good customer relations through effective communication, engagement, participation & scrutiny amongst staff and customers through training and development.

Staff across the Housing Service communicate regularly with customers, seek feedback on services provided, consult on a variety of issues and monitor performance taking account of customers' views with the aim of improving service delivery. These activities are carried out as routine business and not reflected in the budget.

Staff based in One Stop Shops and/or Neighbourhood Offices support their local Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations. This includes assistance with promoting the group, accessing grants, training, managing community based projects, assistance with consultations and administration (including typing, photocopying, printing of local newsletters etc). Support is offered as part of routine business and not reflected in the budget.

Approval of this strategy and supporting action plan by our tenants and other customers will determine future spend of the budget.

A financial breakdown of how monies are spent will be provided to the Tenants' & Residents' Forum on a regular basis, or upon request of Forum members.

Monitoring and Reviewing the Strategy

To ensure the Housing Service's Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019) is working as intended, and there are positive outcomes, the following monitoring arrangements have been put in place:

- Reporting regularly on the outcomes of the Scottish Social Housing Charter, and in particular 'Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy' outcomes. This will be done in consultation with our customers.
- Checking tenants' and other customers' satisfaction with how good they feel we are at keeping them informed about decisions that effect them, opportunities to participate and overall satisfaction with the Council as their landlord.
- Maintaining a consultation database of all consultation and participation activities across the service ensuring compliance with the National Standards for Community Engagement.
- Checking Falkirk Council's performance against other similar sized social landlords across Scotland.
- Providing regular updates to the Tenants' & Residents' Forum and support a monitoring and implementation group.
- Publishing a variety of events, achievements and feedback to consultations in the 'Tenant Talk' magazine and on the Falkirk Council website.
- Carrying out regular audits of Registered Tenants' & Residents' Organisations.
- Regular updates to the Tenants' & Residents' Forum from the various sub-groups including the Scrutiny Panel, Project Award Panel, Editorial Panel etc.
- Publishing an Action Plan to support the Customer Relations Strategy and reviewing progress on actions with the Tenants' & Residents' Forum.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

This Housing Service's Tenant & Customer Participation Strategy (2016 – 2019) builds on the success of previous participation strategies.

Our customers already actively engage and continue to influence the Housing Service so that the quality of housing and the supporting services that they receive are improving. The Housing Service strives to continuously improve by building a good relationship with our customers, working with those who wish to participate and listening to what our customers tell us about the services we provide, regardless of which method they use to express their views.

Our efforts cannot, and do not, stop with the publication of this strategy. We are always looking to improve and find more innovative and imaginative ways for communicating, engaging more effectively with our customers, and for our customers to participate or scrutinise the services we offer. This strategy will evolve as the relationship with our customers grows and develops.

In summary, this strategy sets out how our customers can access the Housing Service and explains how they can communicate and engage with us; participate in influencing the ways that decisions are made on housing issues and scrutinise how the service is performing.

If you would like more information on this strategy, or how you can become involved, you can contact the Community Engagement Team on 01324 590796, by email at inspector.tenant@falkirk.gov.uk or you can find out more by visiting our website at <http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/services/homes-property/council-housing/customer-involvement/>. Alternatively, you can ask to speak to a member of staff in any one of our One Stop Shops and/or Neighbourhood Offices.

Charter Outcome: 1. Equalities

Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
1.a) Support customers to scrutinise our equalities related complaints handling	No scrutiny activity on equalities issues to date	Completed Scrutiny Report	Customer approved approach to equalities complaints handling	Dec 2019	Community Engagement Co-ordinator (CEC), Customer Services Team Leader and Scrutiny Panel	
1. b) Conduct a large-scale tenant satisfaction survey a minimum of every three years, which includes analysis of equalities issues	Last survey in 2013/14	Completed Large Scale Tenant Satisfaction Survey	Report on tenant profile, satisfaction and equalities published for tenants	Dec 2016	CEC	

Charter Outcome: 1. Equalities

Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
1. c) Carry out a fit for purpose review of equalities monitoring across housing services	Various equalities monitoring systems in place	Review recommendations implemented	Suitable templates and system to regularly review and report findings	Dec 2017	CEC and Performance & Compliance Officer (P&CO)	
1. d) Regularly audit the Registered Tenants & Residents Organisations (RTO) register, constitutions, groups' Code of Conduct and staff Partnership Agreement, including equalities issues.	Regular programme of audits of 13 RTO's in place	Number of annual audits and number fully compliant	5 annual RTO audits, all fully compliant by end of year	Annual	Neighbourhood Officers supported by CEC	

Charter Outcome: 1. Equalities

Every tenant and other customer has their individual needs recognised, is treated fairly and with respect, and receives fair access to housing and housing services.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
1. e) Publicise how we can help equalities groups (e.g. disabled people) to participate, via the tenants magazine	2 tenant magazines per year – opportunity to highlight equalities	Number of features in the magazine on equalities	2 equalities features per year	Annual	CEC, Customer Editorial Panel, Central Communications Unit	

Charter Outcome: 2. Communication

Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
2.a) Increase the percentage of tenants who feel their landlord is good at keeping them informed about services and decisions by 10%	73%	Charter Indicator.3	83% (National average 2014/15 81%)	Dec 2019	CEC	
2. b) Report the outcome of all consultation activity in the tenants' magazine	Most but not all published in 'Inspector Tenant' column	Consultation Register up to date and reported in magazine	100% of housing consultations reported in magazine	Each edition of Tenant Talk	CEC and Customer Editorial Panel	
2. c) Report on Housing Services' performance through a wider variety of	Web, magazine, Forums,	Maintain existing and introduce	Performance Publicity Action Plan developed	Dec 2017	CEC P&CO	

Charter Outcome: 2. Communication

Tenants and other customers find it easy to communicate with their landlord and get the information they need about their landlord, how and why it makes decisions and the services it provides.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
methods	Annual Charter Report and Annual Charter Chats	new methods	and implemented with customers			
2. d) Publish at least 3 tenant magazines a year with help from the customer editorial panel	2 per year	Number of magazines	3 per year	Dec 2017	CEC, Customer Editorial Panel, Central Communications Unit	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
3. a) Increase the percentage of tenants satisfied with opportunities given to them to participate in landlords decision making	76%	Charter Indicator	78% (national average 2014/15 70%)	Dec 2019	CEC	
3.b) Comply with our legal obligation to consult tenants on any	Consultation over any proposed policy or service	Reasonable timescale for tenants to reply	Written evidence that we have had regard to the	Audit March 2016 and annually	CEC, Service Managers, Head of	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
proposals that will significantly affect them	standard changes	Report of outcomes	views of tenants and other groups	thereafter	Housing	
3.c) Comply with our legal obligation to consult on any proposed rent or related tenancy charge increases	Annual consultation	Published results and Committee /Executive Report	Evidence that we have had regard to tenant feedback	Annual	CEC, Head of Housing	
3.d) Support scrutiny by our customers to help us improve our services.	16 customers and 25 staff trained by TPAS/SHR on scrutiny	Number of tenants/staff trained Number of scrutiny	25 tenants and 50 staff trained Support up to 5 scrutiny	Jan 2019 Jan 2019	Community Engagement Co-ordinator Scrutiny Panel	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
		exercises completed No. of improvement actions implemented as a result	exercises to be completed At least 3 improvements implemented following each scrutiny exercise	Dec 2019	Service Managers	
3.e) Assess the training needs of staff and tenants in relation to communication, engagement, participation & scrutiny	Training needs assessed individually	Training needs analysis completed	Staff/customer training needs re participation assessed and reported to tenants	Dec 2017	CEC RTO's and Service Managers	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
3. f) Support the Tenants & Residents Forum to review progress against the customer landlord engagement strategy and action plan	No monitoring arrangements in place for 2016-19	Regular monitoring and reporting arrangements in place by Sub Group of Forum	Customer approved approach to monitoring this action plan	April 2016	CEC and Tenants & Residents Forum	
3. g) Increase the number on the 'Point of View'	Register in place	335 tenants on the register, unknown	370 tenants on the register, and 50	Dec 2017	CEC and Neighbourhood Officers	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
housing consultation register by 10%		applicants/other customers on the register	applicants/other customers on the register			
3. h) Support the use of Community Projects by groups	'Make a Difference' financial Award system introduced 2015/16	Number of awards allocated per year	Up to 5 awards per year Resident satisfaction with results	Annual	CEC and Neighbourhood Officers	
3. i) Support Estate Walkabouts with tenants, residents and	Customer led inspection on Estate Walkabouts	Published outcomes	Publish annual walkabout outcomes reports online	April 2016 and annually thereafter	CEC and Neighbourhood Officers	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
Neighbourhood Officers	recommended results are published					
3. j) Support tenants and residents to influence the Housing Asset Management Plan (HAMP)	HAMP Sub-group including 4 tenants/residents meet every 3months	Introduce HAMP sub-group updates to the Tenants & Residents Forum	Increased information on HAMP, and influence by the Tenants & Residents Forum	Dec 2016	CEC and the HAMP sub-group	
3. k) Develop and implement a Consultation Plan for the 2017-22 Local Housing Strategy (LHS)	LHS 2017-22 and Consultation plan are under development	Tenants, homeless people, gypsy/travellers and other customers consulted.	All tenants and other housing service users have had the opportunity to influence the LHS	Dec 2016	CEC and Strategy & Development Co-ordinator	

Charter Outcome: 3. Participation

Tenants and other customers find it easy to participate in and influence their landlord's decisions at a level they feel comfortable with.

Action	Baseline	Indicator /Measure	Target / Milestone	Timescale	Responsible person	Progress Update
3. I) Create a Participation Plan for the Access to Housing and Homeless Service	Various customer satisfaction surveys Specific consultations as required	Increased influence by customers including those accessing housing advice, supported and temporary lets.	Evidence of customers influencing the Access to Housing & Homelessness Service	Plan by June 2016 Implement by Dec 2019	CEC, Homeless Team Co-ordinator and Housing Support Co-ordinator	

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: CAPITAL PROGRAMMES UPDATE REPORT
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 23 February 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the 2015/16 Housing and General Services Capital Programmes which both sit within a 3 year rolling timeframe.

2. 2015/16 HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- 2.1 The report to the Executive on 1 December 2015 advised Members that the projected outturn for the Housing Capital Programme was £29.3m, an underspend of £1.1m. The forecast outturn has now been updated to £26.9m thereby increasing the projected underspend from £1.1m to £3.5m. Appendix 1 details the spend across the various areas of the programme and the movement in forecast from that previously reported is as detailed below:

Project	December Executive £m	February Executive £m	Movement £m
Elemental Improvements	3.1	0.5	(2.6)
Energy Efficiency	0.1	0.3	0.2
New Build Housing	(3.4)	(3.4)	-
Estates & Other Expenditure	0.2	0.2	-
Mortgage to Rent	(1.0)	(1.0)	-
LHS Initiatives	(0.1)	(0.1)	-
Total	(1.1)	(3.5)	(2.4)

- 2.2 In the last report to Executive it had been anticipated that c£3.1m of Elemental Improvements work could be accelerated and brought forward this financial year. However, due to adverse weather conditions over the last two months and more complex technical assessments and design work, it is not possible to bring forward the previously anticipated level of accelerated expenditure. An overspend of £0.5m is now projected.

- 2.3 The Energy Efficiency programme of works is forecast to spend £2.5m, a small overspend of £0.3m. This is mainly due to an increase in the number of replacement heating systems installed.
- 2.4 As previously reported, the New Build Housing projects at Stenhousemuir and Denny have both been delayed, due to design consultations and planning considerations. Both projects are expected to commence in 2016/17, thereby reducing the projected new build spend for 2015/16 to £1.4m, with slippage of £3.4m carried forward to 2016/17.
- 2.5 There is no change in the projected underspend relating to the Mortgage to Rent Scheme. This projection reflects the current positive trend in that less people are requiring to transfer from ownership to rent.

3. 2015/16 GENERAL CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- 3.1 The following paragraphs focus on the main areas of anticipated spend for 2015/16 (see Appendix 2).
- 3.2 **Children's Services (£5.649m)** – Work continues on the extensions to St Joseph's Primary School (£1.1m) and Antonine Primary School (£0.7m). Within the overall forecast for Antonine Primary School, an overspend of £0.16m is included. This overspend will be fully funded from the Expansion of Early Years budget and there is no detrimental impact on the overall 15/16 capital programme. The overspend has occurred as a consequence of the Government's extension of free school meals which required a temporary dining cabin to be procured and installed while the school hall was out of commission due to the extension works. Also, alterations and extension to the new nursery outdoor play area had to be completed in order to secure formal registration with the Care Commission/Inspectorate. Initial design work has started on the new ASN school which is expected to finish in 2017 (£1.0m). The Scottish Government funded initiative Expansion of Early Years, is progressing with spend of £1.0m forecast including additional modular units and nursery alterations at various sites. Within the Expansion of Early Years budget, £1.4m has been re-scheduled to 2017/18 to part fund an extension at Kinnaird Primary school. In addition £1.6m is forecast to be spent across a number of schools for health and safety, capacity issues, general upgrades and will also be used to fund the purchase of the Focus school.
- 3.3 **Development - Roads & Transport (£6.620m)** – The rolling programme of works for bridge strengthening, structural roads works, road safety and street lighting is forecast to spend £5.1m over the year which includes an extra £0.5m for the Salix Street Lighting project.

The Salix Street Lighting project is a government backed scheme whereby the Council have obtained an interest free loan, payable over 7 years (chargeable to revenue budget), for the replacement of 2,500 lanterns with new efficient LED equipment. In addition to the approved budget of £0.2m for cycling, walking, safer streets projects, external funding of £0.4m has been secured bringing the total forecast spend for these projects to £0.6m.

- 3.4 **Development – Planning & Transportation (£1.501m)** – The Grangemouth Flood Assessment scheme will continue with a spend of £0.4m anticipated this year. Within Countryside Access, external funding has been secured which will allow investment of £0.9m to take place this year. Work on the restoration of Kinneil Kerse Landfill site (£0.09m) has started this year following planning permission being granted in February 2015.
- 3.5 **Development - Economic Dev't & Environmental Services (£2.620m)** – Following the contract award, Phase 1 construction in relation to Denny Town Centre is now underway with spend of £2.2m included in the forecast. As part of the Business Property Reinvestment initiative, new units at Abbotsford Business Park will be built at a cost of £0.3m.
- 3.6 **Development – Operational Services (£3.699m)** - £3.1m is forecast to be spent on vehicle replacement this year which includes £1.1m accelerated from 2016/17 budget. The spend on the Crematorium upgrade is likely to be £0.2m with a further £0.2m anticipated for additional interment space. The rolling programme for investment in parks assumes a spend of £0.1m during the year.
- 3.7 **Social Work (£0.241m)** – The Older Peoples Accommodation budget has been carried forward to 2016/17. Spend of £0.2m will be incurred in relation to capital works at various Social Work buildings and the rolling programme of replacement MECS equipment.
- 3.8 **Corporate & Housing Services (£1.780m)** –The Mobile & Flexible Working project is well underway with further spend of £0.5m anticipated this year. Other IT projects include the replacement email system (£0.2m) and server replacements (£0.7m). The forecast for all I.T. projects includes £0.3m accelerated from the 2016/17 budget.
- 3.9 **Community Trust (£1.194m)** – The main areas of spend include the refurbishment of Stenhousemuir Gym (£0.92m), interactive water features (including new wave machine) at the Mariner Centre which is due to complete in June 2016 (£0.09m) and a contribution towards the upgrade of the tennis courts at Dollar Park (£0.05m).
- 3.10 **Helix (£3.037m)** – The Council contribution for Helix is £0.15m, however external funding of £2.9m has been secured from Big Lottery, Scottish Canals and grant monies which will allow the Visitor Centre and the remainder of the Park and facilities to be completed this year.

4. BUDGET AND FORECAST VARIANCE 2015/16

- 4.1 The report to the Executive on 1 December advised Members that the approved 15/16 budget had been revised to £29.15m. The budget has been further revised to £28.02m. This budget adjustment takes account of the Early Years budget of £1.4m which has been re-scheduled to 2017/18 to part fund an extension at Kinnaird Primary School. In addition the revised budget has increased by £0.27m in respect of the purchase of an Aquawhale vehicle which is fully funded from Repairs & Renewals.
- 4.2 The December Executive report advised Members that the General Fund projection was £0.008m less than budget, almost breakeven. The variance now being projected is £1.68m less than budget. Within this movement there is a saving of £0.1m in relation to a number of minor flood prevention schemes which have been redesigned resulting in cost reductions. In addition a saving of £0.08m is forecast in respect of the refurbishment works being carried out at Stenhousemuir Gym. The remaining movement of £1.50m is slippage across a number of Services areas as detailed below:

Service	Forecast Variance (£'m)
Children's Services	0.094
Development Services	0.945
Community Trust	0.461
Total Movement in Slippage	1.500

- **Children's Services** – Antonine Primary School forecast spend increased by £0.086m as explained at para 3.2. The increase in spend is fully funded from within the overall Children's Services Capital budget. The Expansion of Early Years forecast has reduced by £0.15m due to tender delays. The works at Dobbie Hall have slipped by £0.03m and will now take place in 2016/17.
- **Development Services** – Grangemouth Flood Prevention Scheme is forecast to slip by £0.08m due to access delays on sites occupied by Ineos. In addition Denny Town Centre project has slipped by £0.35m due to prolonged wet weather and the new units at Abbotsford Business Park have also slipped by £0.44m, due to protracted legal deliberations in respect of land acquisitions. Spend on the Crematorium project has slipped by £0.07m due to tender delays.

- **Community Trust** – Slippage of £0.071m in respect of Mariner Centre Wave Machine and £0.110m for the flume at Grangemouth Sports Complex. No interest was received from initial invitations to tender for both these projects therefore contracts were retendered and work is now scheduled to be completed in June 2016. The slippage for the Community Trust also includes ICT Development of £0.280m. Spend will take place once an outline specification has been prepared in conjunction with Council IT staff, for a customer friendly online booking system.

5. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS

- 5.1 A series of Prudential Indicators are used to demonstrate that capital spending plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable. Appendix 3 details these indicators for 2015/16.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The General Fund Capital Programme is forecast to be under budget by £1.68m, £0.18m of which is a genuine budget saving.
- 6.2 The Housing Capital Programme is forecast to be under budget by £3.5m.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are invited to:

- 7.1 **Note the budget and forecast position for the General Fund & Housing Capital Programmes for 2015/16.**
- 7.2 **Note the Prudential Indicators per Appendix 3.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & HOUSING SERVICES
Date: 29 January 2016
Ref: AAB230216 – Capital Programmes Update Report
Contact: Carole McGhee

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

2015/16 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME - SUMMARY****APRIL 2015 to DECEMBER 2015**

EXPENDITURE	2015/06 REVISED BUDGET	2015/16 FORECAST	2015/16 FORECAST VARIANCE
HOUSING INVESTMENT PLANS	£000	£000	£000
ELEMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS	13,900	14,394	494
ENERGY EFFICIENCY	2,200	2,490	290
NEW BUILD HOUSING	4,824	1,443	(3,381)
ESTATES & OTHER EXPENDITURE	1,050	1,173	123
PROPERTY BUY BACKS	6,223	6,223	0
MORTGAGE TO RENT	1,000	40	(960)
LHS INITIATIVES	700	600	(100)
WINDOW LEASE BUY OUT	497	497	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURE 2015/16	30,394	26,860	(3,534)

RESOURCES	2015/06 REVISED BUDGET	2015/16 FORECAST	2015/16 FORECAST VARIANCE
BUDGETED PRUDENTIAL BORROWING	20,709	16,011	(4,698)
COUNCIL HOUSE SALES	1,600	3,200	1,600
ENERGY SECTION INCOME	300	300	0
CFCR	4,264	4,264	0
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT - NEW BUILD	966	250	(716)
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT - BUY BACK	0	1,800	1,800
SECOND HOMES COUNCIL TAX	558	0	(558)
PLANNING OBLIGATION - AFFORDABLE HOUSING	500	500	0
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT MORTGAGE TO RENT GRANT	200	8	(192)
MORTGAGE TO RENT BORROWING	800	30	(770)
WINDOW LEASE BUY OUT	497	497	0
TOTAL RESOURCES 2015/16	30,394	26,860	(3,534)

2015/16 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**GENERAL PROGRAMME - SUMMARY****APRIL 2015 TO DECEMBER 2015**

EXPENDITURE	2015/06 REVISED BUDGET	2015/16 FORECAST	2015/16 FORECAST VARIANCE
SERVICE INVESTMENT PLANS	£000	£000	£000
CHILDREN'S SERVICES	5,934	5,649	(285)
DEV - ROADS & TRANSPORT	6,670	6,620	(50)
DEV - PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION	1,681	1,501	(180)
DEV - ECONOMIC DEV'T & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	4,205	2,620	(1,585)
DEV - OPERATIONAL SERVICES	2,853	3,699	846
SOCIAL WORK	241	241	0
CORPORATE & HOUSING	1,643	1,780	137
COMMUNITY TRUST	1,757	1,194	(563)
HELIX	3,037	3,037	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURE 2015/16	28,021	26,341	(1,680)

RESOURCES	2015/06 REVISED BUDGET	2015/16 FORECAST	2015/16 FORECAST VARIANCE
FALKIRK COUNCIL BORROWING	3,005	1,325	(1,680)
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT BLOCK GRANTS	13,458	13,458	0
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT BLOCK GRANTS	4,071	4,071	0
CAPITAL RECEIPTS - SALES	649	649	0
EXTERNAL FUNDING	5,825	5,825	0
RESERVES (DMR, CFCR and R&R)	1,013	1,013	0
TOTAL RESOURCES 2015/16	28,021	26,341	(1,680)

FALKIRK COUNCIL
PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS
[Excluding HRA]

PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR		BUDGET 2015/16	PROJECTED 2015/16	COMMENTS
1.	Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream	5%	5%	Shows how much of the Council's income is committed to repaying debt arising from capital investment.
2.	Incremental Impact of Capital Expenditure on Council Tax	NIL	NIL	Affordability Indicator showing implications of capital expenditure and its financing on the "bottom-line".
3.	External Borrowing Accounting Adjustment – Finance Lease Liabilities Capital Financing Requirement (includes HRA) Accounting Adjustment – Finance Lease Liabilities	£'m 254.9 <u>115.4</u> 370.3 315.4 <u>120.5</u> 435.9	£'m 244.1 <u>115.4</u> 359.5 287.8 <u>120.5</u> 408.3	This is a key Prudence Indicator which shows that over the medium term external borrowing will only be for a capital purpose. The capital financing requirement reflects the underlying need to borrow to finance assets. It should be noted that the sums included as “Accounting Adjustment – Finance Lease Liabilities”, are not an increase in borrowing or need to borrow, they are merely a presentational change as a result of the requirement to report under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).
4.	Capital Expenditure (GF & TIF)	£'m 28.3	£'m 28.2	Simply the approved and projected capital expenditure including TIF.
5.	Capital Financing Requirement (GF only)	£'m 299.2	£'m 280.4	The Capital Financing Requirement reflects the underlying need to borrow for Capital Investment.
6.	Authorised Limit (AL) for External Debt:- Borrowing Other Long Term Liabilities	£'m 294.6 <u>115.4</u> <u>410.0</u>	£'m 294.6 <u>115.4</u> <u>410.0</u>	This sets the maximum level of External Debt, based on capital investment plans and allowing some headroom over the Operational Boundary (see below) for exceptional circumstances.
7.	Operational Boundary (OB) for External Debt:- Borrowing Other Long Term Liabilities	£'m 289.6 <u>115.4</u> <u>405.0</u>	£'m 289.6 <u>115.4</u> <u>405.0</u>	This is set at a lower level than the Authorised Limit and is a robust estimate of the External Debt level arising from Capital Investment Plans.

PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR		BUDGET 2015/16	PROJECTED 2015/16	COMMENTS
8.	Actual External Debt: External Borrowing Other Long Term Liabilities	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>	This is an actual rather than estimated indicator and will be reported when outturns become available.
9.	CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Services	Code has been adopted by the Council		The Treasury Management Code is designed to ensure prudence in treasury operations.

FALKIRK COUNCIL
HRA PRUDENTIAL CODE INDICATORS

PRUDENTIAL INDICATOR		BUDGET 2015/16	PROJECTED 2015/16	COMMENTS
1.	Ratio of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream	17%	15%	Shows how much of the Council's HRA income is committed to repaying debt arising from capital investment.
2.	Incremental Impact of Capital Exp. on weekly Rent	£0.33	£0.33	Affordability Indicator showing implications of capital expenditure and its financing on the "bottom-line".
3.	Capital Expenditure	£'m 29.3	£'m 26.9	Simply the approved and projected capital expenditure.
4.	Capital Financing Requirement	£'m 136.7	£'m 127.9	The Capital Financing Requirement reflects the underlying need to borrow for HRA Capital Investment

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**Subject: DENNY TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION:
PHASE TWO DEVELOPMENT**
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 23 FEBRUARY 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the status of the Denny town centre regeneration project including the result of the Phase 2 marketing process.

2.0 BACKGROUND & PROJECT UPDATE

- 2.1 The Executive considered reports providing updates on the project on 29 April, 17 June and 30 September 2014, covering issues including the development timescale, site assembly progress, relocation of the War Memorial and Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) opportunity
- 2.2 The Executive considered a further report on 24 February 2015 in relation to the marketing process for the Phase 2 site. This had identified two interests and advised of a requirement to remarket given that neither of the offers had taken into consideration the requirement for a Denny Eastern Access Road (DEAR) contribution. A further report for the 9 June Executive confirmed that one interest had responded to the remarketing exercise. The Executive agreed that further detail be provided on this proposal in relation to a commitment from an operator and further work on the design.
- 2.3 Work is well under way on the first phase of the new town centre with the contractor, Clark Contracts Ltd, proceeding to programme. In the course of this work the Council has worked in collaboration with BT Public Services Network to deliver a public wi-fi scheme as part of the phase 1 plans. BT has agreed to this element and this will be included in the town square development.

3.0 PHASE 2 DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The Phase 2 site was remarketed by SGM, commercial agents and a report was submitted to the Council's Executive on the 9 June 2015 on the results of the marketing exercise. One offer was received, from County Properties (Northern) Limited, a privately owned investment and development company with a large, mixed portfolio throughout the UK.
- 3.2 The Executive agreed that County Properties should be approached requesting that they review their submission for the scheme to better fit the requirements of the brief and, on the basis they are identified as the preferred bidder, seek commitment from a store operator.

3.3 County Properties have now advanced their discussions with B & M Retail Ltd. who are interested in a new 15,000sqft single storey retail unit. B&M has grown quickly in recent years with over 140 stores across the UK selling a range of food and household products. The revised design identifies the unit facing Stirling Street with the main entrance off a public space adjacent to Phase 1 and some 55 car spaces to the side of the building accessed off Stirling Street. A drawing, showing County Properties proposals is provided as Appendix 1. They have confirmed that, as the B & M requirement is for a store size of 15,000sqft as against the original anticipated store size of 23,500sqft, their original offer of £650,000 is reduced to £433,227 for the Phase 2 site.

3.4 There are 2 options available for the Executive to consider:

- Option 1: Accept the offer submitted by County Properties
- Option 2: Reject the offer and remarket the site on completion of Phase 1.

Option 1: Accept the Offer

3.5 A detailed assessment of the submission has been prepared by SGM and Council officers, including a scoring for each of the factors set out in the guidance issued with the marketing (see Appendix 2).

- the expertise and technical capability of the developer
- the financial terms of the offer
- the deliverability of the scheme on-site
- roads and transport considerations
- design considerations

Expertise and technical capability

The developer is a well-established company with a track record of delivering projects of this type.

Financial terms

The offer by County Properties is considered by SGM to be a realistic offer. It is subject to confirmation of a lease with a retail operator. The bidder will require to carry out site investigations which may affect the resultant price. Any additional costs of these works would require to be verified by the Council's Design unit.

Deliverability

County Properties have identified B & M as the operator subject to conclusion of a legal agreement. Confirmation has been given by County that B&M are keen to proceed with delivery of the project as soon as the Council's agreement is in place (subject to all necessary consents).

Roads & Transport

County Properties scheme does present some traffic related issues in the initial design, with site servicing accessed from Davies Row. An additional 55 spaces are provided off Stirling Street. Further in-depth analysis of the proposed scheme will be required prior to formal planning consent being secured.

Design

The design does present issues with the site levels (an acknowledged site constraint), and offers no frontage to the Davies Row car park level. Further consideration of the design of the scheme will be required via the planning process if this option is chosen.

- 3.6 As a consequence of this appraisal, the SGM/Council officers assessment suggests that the County Properties scheme is deliverable within a timeframe that aligns well with the programme for Phase 1. The scheme design has been discussed and amended through discussion with the Council's planning and transport staff. Any remaining design related issues would require to be resolved via the planning process if the Council were minded to proceed with this scheme.

Option 2: Reject the offer

- 3.7 The Council has the ability to reject the offer and delay re-marketing until Phase 1 is completed. Delaying the site development acknowledges that future offers may be improved upon in price, design or delivery as a consequence of the Phase 1 completion. However this is not guaranteed and presents disadvantages in that:
- equally there may be less interest in the site and the option available currently may be lost.
 - there is less opportunity to be flexible over the design as Phase 1 would be in place and site levels unable to be adjusted
 - the Phase 2 site would lie undeveloped for an extended period
 - the opportunity to attract additional retailers to Phase 1 using Phase 2 commitment to promote this is lost
 - the opportunity to integrate the design and development of Phase 1 and 2 concurrently is lost.

Appraisal Summary

- 3.8 It is suggested that there is merit in proceeding with the delivery of the scheme at this point. The financial offer is considered by SGM to propose a realistic value for the site and although the design lacks the level of integration with the Phase 1 proposals that might have been preferred, this has to be balanced against a requirement to see development progressing on Phase 2 to assist the market interest in Phase 1 and avoid a neighbouring derelict site. Further, more detailed consideration of the scheme will take place through the planning process to achieve any necessary alterations to the design. In addition it is suggested that the sale would be conditional on the bidders commitment to a specific development timescale.

- 3.9 It is suggested that Members consider the proposals submitted and the options outlined above for a decision to be reached on the Phase 2 scheme.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

Policy Implications

- 4.1 Town centre regeneration is a key priority of the Strategic Community Plan, *Growth, Investment & Inclusion*, the Council's economic strategy and related policies.

Planning Implications

- 4.2 Town centre regeneration is a key tool in the delivery of the Council's Local Development Plan commitment to enhance the role of town centres and regenerate district centres.

Legal Implications

- 4.3 Delivery of the regeneration project is being progressed with the support of the Council's Governance Services and, where necessary, external legal advisors. Should the Executive agree to accept the offer from County Properties, authority is requested to conclude the necessary missives in appropriate terms.

Financial Implications

- 4.4 The £433,227 receipt expected from the Phase 2 bidder will contribute towards the capital funding allocation for the Denny town centre regeneration project. The level of receipt may be affected by any additional costs of works arising from site constraints as verified by Design Services staff.
- 4.5 The approved General Services Capital Programme has sufficient provision together with the grant funding and anticipated receipts to allow Members to pursue either of the 2 options within the existing approved budget.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Denny town centre regeneration project has reached an important stage with the construction of phase 1 underway and currently on programme.
- 5.2 The receipt of an offer for Phase 2 is welcome, however there are issues for the Council to consider:
- County Properties have submitted a realistic financial offer. They have the relevant experience to deliver the scheme. County Properties have identified an occupier as B & M Retail Ltd. who have indicated an intention to proceed with the scheme, giving more certainty over delivery. They have amended their design to address issues relating to integration with Phase 1 and traffic concerns. Any remaining design issues would require to be resolved via the planning process. The offer may be amended to reflect confirmed site constraints.

- The second option of rejecting the offer would allow a further round of marketing, pending completion of Phase 1. However it would miss out on the opportunity to integrate the design and development of the two phases. Given the recent fluctuations in the market for this type of activity, this cannot be guaranteed.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Executive:

- i) notes the above report on the progress of the Denny town centre regeneration project
- ii) considers the proposals submitted by County Properties (Northern) Ltd for delivery of Phase 2 and the options identified in this report:
 - (a) Option 1 – if minded to proceed, authorises the Director of Development Services to conclude contractual terms with County Properties for the disposal of the site on the basis of the scheme submitted
 - (b) Option 2 – to reject the offer from County Properties and agree to withhold marketing of the Phase 2 site until completion of Phase 1.

.....

Director of Development Services

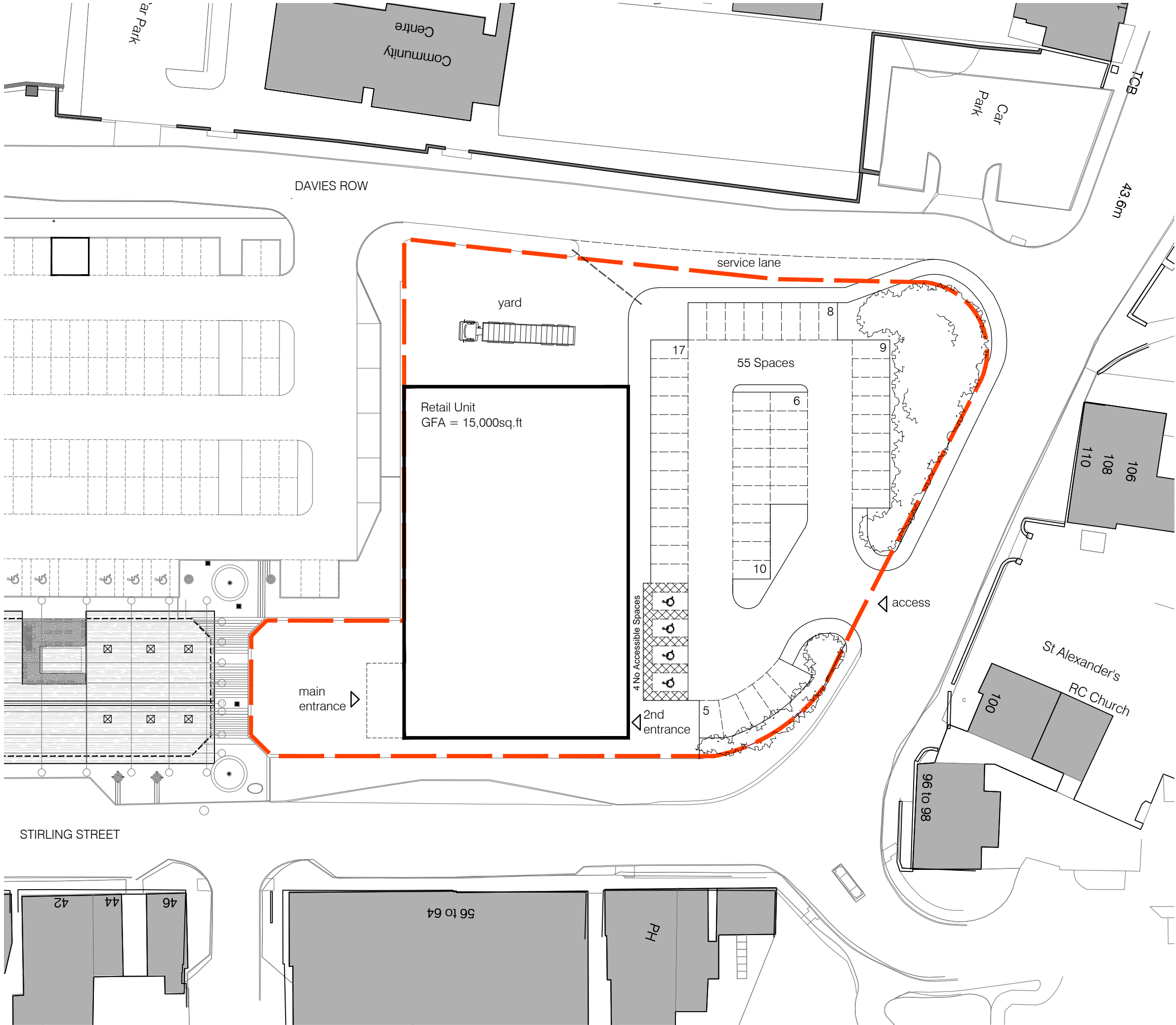
Date: 10 February 2016

Contact Officers: Colin Frame/Douglas Duff. Ext: 0972/4952.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

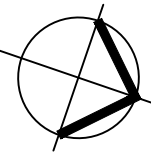
1. Denny Town Centre Regeneration Files.

Anyone wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone 01324 590972 and ask for Colin Frame.



Note
The contractor will be held to have examined the site and checked all dimensions and levels before commencing construction work. No assumption should be made without reference to the architect. No dimensions should be scaled from this drawing.

Rev	Description	Date	By
A	Layout revised as per client comments	20.10.15	PM
B	Layout revised as per client request.	27.01.16	PM



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SKETCH

Client
County Properties

Project Title
Proposed Retail Development
Denny

Drawing Title
Proposed Site Plan

Scale 1:500 @ A3	Date 09.10.14
Drawn by CM	Checked by SC

Job No 14048G	Drawing No AL(0)100	Revision B
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**DENNY TOWN CENTRE REGNERATION
PHASE 2 SITE SUBMISSIONS
PROJECT APPRAISAL**

COUNTY PROPERTIES:

Criteria	Score (%)	Comments
<i>SGM Scoring</i>		<i>SGM Comments</i>
Expertise & Technical Capability (out of 20%)	20	The company has extensive experience of mixed use commercial development
Financial Terms (out of 20%)	20	SGM consider offer to be realistic offer
Deliverability (out of 20%)		
Design terms (5%)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited integration with Phase 1 • Operator identified but legal commitment to be confirmed • Project is internally financed
Certainty of commitment (5%)	4	
Financial ability to deliver (5%)	5	
Delivery of financial offer (5%)	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The offer is based on an operator interest although subject to site investigations and approvals through the planning process.
<i>Council Scoring</i>		<i>Council Comments</i>
Roads/Transport (20%)	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service arrangement affects use of Davies Row. • The provision of 55 parking bays is positive
Design (20%)	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No direct connection to Davies Row carpark frontage • Two entrances on Stirling Street. • Blank walls shown in operator carpark • “Warehouse” type building has limited presence although scale is appropriate • Limited glazing / active frontage on Stirling Street • Limited account of topography of the site • Poor and inappropriate use of materials
Total =	73	

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: BUSINESS GATEWAY & BUSINESS SUPPORT UPDATE
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 23 FEBRUARY 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report gives an update on the Council's business support activity from April 2014 to September 2015 as delivered by the Growth & Investment Unit within Development Services. The report advises members of additional European funding secured to support Falkirk businesses; gives an update on proposed changes in the provision of business loans and provides details on the work taking place in relation to the Task Force established following Scottish Power's announcement of the closure of its plant at Longannet.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Growth & Investment Unit was established in October 2012 and since then the Council's business support activities, including the Business Gateway Service have been delivered from offices within Falkirk Community Stadium.
- 2.2 Falkirk Council is the lead local authority for Business Gateway services in Forth Valley with £982,000 per annum of funding made available from Scottish Government to deliver the service. This funding provides support for start-up and growth of businesses within the Falkirk, Stirling, and Clackmannanshire Council areas.

3.0 FALKIRK BUSINESS SUPPORT PERFORMANCE

- 3.1 A progress report covering the key results of the service from April 2014 to September 2015 is attached to this report (Appendix 1) and is summarised as follows:-

Start-up Businesses

Support Type	April 2014 - March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Start –Up Businesses*	376	188
Workshops	65	33
Aftercare	414	202
*Of these start-ups, 58 are higher value starts which will go on to achieve a turnover in excess of the VAT threshold (£82,000)		

Growth Businesses

Support Type	April 2014-March 2015	April 2015-Sept 2015
Growth Advisory Service	39	20
Growth Pipeline (accepted)	22	8
Direct Relationship Management with SE	4	1
The companies accessing additional support from Scottish Enterprise project a forecast turnover of £55m by year 3.		
Forecast Jobs	547	303
Jobs forecast to be created from this support over the next 3 years		
Business Referrals	330	108
Referrals were made to other support agencies for specialist help with business growth		

Customer Satisfaction Feedback

The Business Gateway National Unit monitors customer satisfaction and respondents to this survey have all made contact with or received support from Business Gateway. The satisfaction levels expressed during this period were as follows:

Customer Satisfaction Feedback	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – June 2015	July 2015 – September 2015
Customers who expressed overall satisfaction	81%	85%	91%

3.2 The Council delivers the following additional activities to new and existing businesses offering advice and support to develop business and create employment:-

- **Supplier Development Programme** - advice, information, and training for businesses to access public sector contracts 140 Falkirk businesses are registered with the programme, with 21 delegates from 7 Falkirk companies accessing training.
- **Social Media and e-commerce** - workshops on social media for business. 42 workshops were delivered and 50 companies accessed support for web audits.
- **HR Advice** - Business Gateway Plus, businesses accessed HR support. In addition an Employer Toolkit was developed in partnership with the Employment Training Unit,
- **Partnership Action for Continuing Employment (PACE)** - This initiative offers support to businesses affected by redundancy situations. Since April 2014, support was provided to 42 companies including Keir Group and Tesco

4.0 LONGANNET TASK FORCE

- 4.1 Scottish Power announced the closure of the Longannet Power Station in March 2015. Following this announcement a task force, involving Scottish Power, local Councils and other agencies was established by the Scottish Government. Longannet is the largest power station in Scotland and the third largest coal fired power station in Europe with a generating capacity of 2,400 megawatts. The closure is anticipated to result in the loss of 260 jobs (c55 in the Falkirk area) with a total reduction of c1000 jobs across the Scottish economy. In response to the announcement the task force initiated actions to offer assistance to employees seeking other job opportunities or retraining. A round table event for supply chain business also took place.
- 4.2 An action plan, identifying a programme of actions to take place involving support for the employees, businesses and communities affected is being prepared for consideration by the Task Force at its next meeting on 29th February. The Council has contributed to this work and is seeking support for interventions which will assist the communities in the Falkirk area that are affected by the announcement. The potential for these interventions to connect with initiatives taking place at Grangemouth in relation to the energy and chemicals sectors has been highlighted in this work. Funding support of £9m is being sought by the local Councils to assist delivery of the action plan and a decision will be made by Scottish Government as to the level of assistance to be provided.

5.0 ERDF - BUSINESS GATEWAY PLUS

- 5.1 As reported to members, in July 2013 the Council was successful in receiving European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) funding of £293,000 to provide additional services to enhance business support in the Falkirk area. Business Gateway Plus (Forth Valley) provided wider, more comprehensive packages of business growth support across the area including *Expert Help* - specialist support to sustain and develop businesses and offer specialist human resource support to businesses. This ERDF programme concluded 30 September 2015. In the Falkirk area the additional support assisted 981 businesses and helped to create a further 195 jobs.
- 5.2 A new ERDF Programme 2015-2018 has been secured, with Falkirk Council acting as the lead authority for Forth Valley to manage a new 5 year programme of Business Gateway Plus activity. Following Scottish Government approval it is intended to commence delivery from March 2016. Indicative allocations have been made to each local authority with Falkirk being awarded an additional £580,000 to be delivered over the next 5 years.
- 5.3 The programme is aimed at encouraging businesses to grow and create jobs. An additional 90 Falkirk companies will be assisted each year with 110 interventions generating additional 115.5 jobs via the following activity:-
- *Expert Help* - up to 3 days of consultancy support in a specialist topic such as strategy development, marketing, ICT, environmental or process improvements or marketing.

- A full time Business Adviser dedicated to supporting businesses which do not meet the growth criteria (increasing turnover of more than £200,000 in 2 years) for acceptance on to the Business Gateway Growth Advisory Service. A health check and action plan will be offered and additional products identified such as Expert Help.
- Growth workshop programme providing training for growing business.

5.4 A strategic application was made timeously and was approved in November 2015 with operational business support detail now being considered by the Scottish Government. Operational approvals have been delayed across Scotland due to Scottish Government and EU control issues and actions are being pursued through national networks to allow approval from Scottish Government as soon as possible.

6.0 FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES

6.1 Restricted access to finance for businesses can be a barrier to growth. Since October 2012, the Council has promoted a suite of funding products. These were introduced or enhanced as a consequence of efficiencies identified when in-house delivery of business support services commenced. A summary of these is set out below:

6.2 *Small Business Grant Scheme*

	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 –Sept 2015
Number of grants	30	12
Amount of funding	81,263	22,872
Private sector investment	156,661	197,101
Additional jobs created	40	25
The scheme targets business with fewer than 10 employees or a turnover of less than £500,000.		

6.3 *BP Business Loan Fund*

The BP Business Loan Fund	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015-Sept 2015
Number of loans granted	4	0
Total amount of loans	£33500	
Additional jobs	13	
Safeguarded Jobs	48	
This provides unsecured loans of up to £10,000 at 6% interest to anyone considering starting up or growing their own business in the Falkirk Council area. The current balance of the fund is £159,000 with an additional £80,000 due in repayments over up to 5 years.		

As mentioned in the last update to the Executive on 17 March 2015, a new national government business loan scheme has been launched - The Start Up Loan Company (SULCo). Members agreed to a review of the BP Loan Fund, given the similarities between the 2 funds. There have been 2 major changes with the Fund since then.

- First, BP has formally notified Falkirk Council that due to company priorities it does not wish to continue engagement with the loan fund. It transferred its share of the funds to the Council, on the condition that it be used to support SMEs in the Falkirk area.

Secondly, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) requires that any organisation wishing to offer regulated loans of under £25,000 to individuals must secure a Consumer Credit Licence (CCL) and operate under a highly regulated regime. Under the previous regime overseen by the Office of Fair Trading, Falkirk Council as a local authority was exempt from this requirement.

Interim permission to lend was granted by the FCA to Falkirk Council to continue offering and managing existing loans until 30 Sept 2015. After extensive consideration, the view has been reached that it is impractical for the Council to obtain a full licence due to the compliance costs and risks. Alternative options were investigated as to how the BP Loan Fund could be offered to businesses within the new regulatory context. While the Council could continue to manage and promote the loan fund to limited companies only; a direct consequence would be exclusion of sole traders who represent 50% of previous applicants.

To enable continued loan support to both limited companies and sole traders, the BP Loan Fund requires to be held and managed by a CCL registered and regulated organisation. Following research only one such body appropriate to conduct this work was identified. DSL Ltd is a community development finance institution (CDFI) based in Glasgow and established in 1993. In addition to operating its own loan fund, DSL Ltd has a client base throughout Scotland and administers funds on behalf of Scottish Enterprise, SULCo and the British Army. By having the BP Loan fund also available in their portfolio, there is a potential benefit to maximise funding packages for Falkirk businesses by considering dual applications from funds simultaneously. DSL has interim permission from the FCA to provide regulated loans, and a full application is pending.

Given the sole available option, an exception to competition has been used to procure the services of DSL Ltd under paragraph 5.8 of Contract Standing Orders, on the following basis:

- i) the name of the BP Loan fund has been changed to the Falkirk Business Loan Fund (The Fund) to reflect the change that BP no longer has any promotional involvement or engagement.
- ii) the existing client portfolio of loans (around 25 cases) to be transferred to DSL together with of an initial sum of £30,000 from the BP Loan Fund balance to DSL Ltd to administer and promote the Fund. The balance of £129,000 remains with the Council and can be applied to the Fund in future years if required.
- iii) a Service Level Agreement has been prepared under which DSL Ltd will be authorised to operate and promote the loan fund instead of Falkirk Council, conducting all future lending administration, assessment of new applications, loan payment monitoring and recovery. Falkirk Council will still promote the loan fund scheme as before but all applicant assessment and approvals will be by DSL.

This arrangement will cost £9,000 in initial setup and £4,130 p.a. thereafter which is considered reasonable. The contract with DSL will be reviewed after a period of one year.

The East of Scotland Investment Fund (ESIF)

- 6.4 ESIF offers loans of up to £100,000 to new and growing, small and medium sized businesses. The current balance of the fund in Falkirk is £172,123. The loan fund was originally set up with 10 local authorities from the East of Scotland to create a loan fund big enough attract ERDF funding. This ERDF structural funding period has since expired and this fund came to an end in December 2015. The opportunity has been taken to set up a pan Scotland loan fund accessing the new ERDF structural funds from April 2016.

ESIF	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Loans Granted	2	0
Additional Jobs Created	14	0
Loan Amount	£100,000	

6.5 *Business Loans Scotland*

The new pan-Scotland fund will be established to replace ESIF with an anticipated membership of 30 out of 32 possible local authorities. It will be CCL compliant and will have around £15-£16 million to lend over 3 years, made up of 40% ERDF, 30% member contributions and a remaining 30% a bank loan. The fund will operate on a similar basis to the ESIF with member authorities having their contributions ring fenced for their own approval and dispersal in their area. The assets of the ESIF and West of Scotland Loan Fund (WSLF) will transfer over to Business Loans Scotland Ltd. It is proposed that Falkirk Council join the initiative, transferring it's balance of £172,123 to the new fund.

7.0 COMMUNICATION, PROMOTION & NETWORKING

- 7.1 In addition to Business Gateway marketing activity, the Council supports the Falkirk Business Panel. A series of communication initiatives and events for local businesses has been delivered over the year including the Business Panel conference, business breakfasts update events and an exhibition - now called Falkirk Business Day. These are supplemented by regular Falkirk Business e-zines, a quarterly newsletter and social media announcements highlighting key business initiatives, opportunities and business resilience support resilience.
- 7.2 Local business support is being rebranded under the Invest Falkirk and Business Falkirk theme, to include Falkirk Business newsletters, e-zines and a dedicated website. Business support in Falkirk will also be targeted through an improved Business Gateway local page.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 *Policy*

The Council's support of the local businesses sector is consistent with the Strategic Community Plan and the Councils new economic strategy – *Growth, Investment, Inclusion*, approved by Members December 2015

8.2 ***Personnel***

The Growth & Investment unit currently employs a Principal Officer, a Business Engagement officer and 4 Business Adviser posts to deliver business support. Delivery of ERDF funding for the programme 2015-20 requires employment of a Business Adviser and part time Economic Development Officer to manage all ERDF claims across Forth Valley. These positions are 100% funded from ERDF and will be appointed to the team for the period of the programme.

8.3 ***Financial***

The £580,000 of external ERDF funding secured over the next 5 years will be matched to existing budgets for delivery of additional Business Gateway services.

8.4 ***Legal***

Due to delays in Scottish Government providing approval for the new ERDF business support programme and subsequent advice received from Governance staff, the Council has awarded a 6 month extension to the original Business Gateway core contract awarded in 2012 for Business Gateway services to be delivered in the Clackmannanshire and Stirling areas. Retendering of this contract will commence once the ERDF award has been made.

8.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The Council's Business Gateway services are a critical component of the Council's new *Economic Strategy – Growth, Investment, Inclusion* and are being delivered successfully. The redesigned programme of financial support and provision of additional external ERDF match funding to complement and expand delivery of its Business Gateway and wider business support activities will help to sustain the quality of services delivered.

9.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 **It is recommended that the Executive:-**

- i) **Notes the performance of Business Gateway and related business support activities since April 2014;**
- ii) **Notes the changes to the BP Loan fund as set out in Para 6.3 and the use of an exception to competition under paragraph 5.8 of contract standing orders;**
- iii) **Notes the conclusion of the East of Scotland Investment fund and agrees to participate in the formation of Business Loans Scotland, transferring its balance of £172,123 over to the new fund;**
- iv) **Agrees to implement the ERDF Business Gateway Programme for the period 2015-20 when approved including recruitment of two additional members of staff as set out in Para 8.2**
- v) **Notes the progress of the Longanet Task Force.**

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Director of Development Services

Date: 10 February 2016

Contact Officer: Pete Reid Ext: 0971

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Business Gateway/Business Support files

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers Pete Reid listed above should telephone 01324 590971.

BUSINESS SUPPORT PROGRESS REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report gives an update on the Council's business support activity from April 2014 - September 2015 (18 months) as delivered by the now established Growth & Investment Unit within Development Services.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In June 2012 Falkirk Council agreed to bring business support services in-house with effect from 1 October 2012. In January 2014 the Executive was updated regarding the progress and performance of the business support activities delivered by the Council – The Falkirk Business Panel, the BP Business Loan Fund, the East of Scotland Investment Fund and a range of discretionary business support services including the then newly established Small Business Grant Scheme. Efficiencies generated by the new delivery model enabled the Council to introduce additional business support activity to its business support service.
- 2.2 Since October 2012 business support to the small and medium sized enterprise sector in the Falkirk area including delivery of the new Business Gateway contract has been delivered by the Council's Growth & Investment Unit business support team. This team comprises the Principal Business Support Officer supported by 5 Business Advisors, a Business Engagement Officer and administrative support. The team is located at The Falkirk Stadium and responsible for:-
- i) Delivering Business Gateway services for start up and existing businesses including:-
 - Start-up workshops
 - Business skills training
 - Business advisory service
 - Aftercare services
 - ii) Providing advice and access to funding including:-
 - The BP Loan Fund
 - The new Small Business Grant Scheme
 - The East of Scotland Investment Fund
 - iii) Offering advice to the Council's property tenants and potential tenants.
 - iv) Providing seminars and events in line with the economic climate and to help develop the local economy
 - v) Developing and maintaining professional business services networks.
 - vi) Production of Falkirk Business newsletters and regular update e-zines to Falkirk's business community.

3.0 BUSINESS SUPPORT ACTIVITY & PERFORMANCE

- 3.1 The business support programmes delivered by Falkirk Council are augmented by the support available through the Business Gateway contract delivered as part of a consortium in the Forth Valley involving STEP (Stirling) and CETERIS (Clackmannanshire). The following support has been provided through the Business Gateway.

3.2 Start-up Businesses

Start-up Service - One to many/ one to one advice and support available to anyone thinking about start up a business. Services are available to clients at all stages of the start-up process from simply thinking about self-employment at some point in the future, starting the planning process or actually started trading. The Council's experienced Business Advisers give advice about business plans, market research, licenses, legal entities, funding, taking on employees, property etc.

Higher Value starts - Some businesses may never employ staff or take on premises but will provide an income similar to that of a paid job. These types of start-ups may only require limited support from a start-up adviser whereas those businesses which trade at around the VAT threshold (82,000) or employ staff can be more complex and therefore require specific support and guidance. An enhanced level of service is available to these start-ups and the Business Adviser works more intensively with them to prepare an action plan and identify additional help which is available.

Start-up Workshops - To help people think about starting a business there are key workshops covering the main topics to consider. Lasting 3 hours these are regularly promoted and run every month at Falkirk Stadium and alternate between day time and evening sessions.

Aftercare - Once a business has officially started clients can obtain advice and support from the Business Adviser for a further 3 years. Planned telephone and email follow up of start-ups occurs at the 6, 12 and 18 month stage and the offer of follow up assistance and support is sustained.

3.3 Existing Businesses

Although Business Gateway is best known for helping start ups, it is important to stress that half of the resources are targeted at existing businesses. There is a wide range of support from the Growth Advisers on all aspects of running a business from funding and strategy to exporting and accessing new markets.

The service is particularly interested in supporting those businesses which have the ambition and capability to grow and create jobs. Business Advisers work on a one to one basis with clients in this category to develop action plans for growth which identifies support required to achieve this. The support may come from within Business Gateway resources or may involve accessing external products from other business support agencies such as Scottish Enterprise or Scottish Development International.

Growth Advisory Service - Businesses which anticipate growing their turnover by £200k over 18 months access more intensive support, known as Growth Advisory Service. Areas for support include strategy development, innovation, funding, financial readiness, procurement, market development HR, ecommerce, or premises.

Growth Pipeline - Businesses which anticipate growing their turnover by £400K in next 18 months access a service known as Growth Pipeline. These clients receive a more intense level of support as they have the potential to go on and grow more significantly. These clients can access the specialist support available to Scottish Enterprise account managed companies at a subsidised rate as it is anticipated some may go on to meet the criteria to be accepted by Scottish Enterprise for account management.

Direct Relationship Management (Account Management) Businesses which anticipate growing their turnover by more than £1m over 3 years. These clients are referred to Scottish Enterprise for the Account Management Service and are allocated a dedicated Account Manager who will work with the company to access Scottish Enterprise Products.

The number of companies accepted on to DRM with Scottish Enterprise is 5 with a forecasted increase in turnover of £20,282,600 over 3 years.

The total number of jobs forecast to be created over 3 years by businesses supported on Growth Advisory Service and then on to Growth pipeline, and then DRM is 940

Specialist Help - Part of Business Gateway is referring businesses to other support agencies for specialist help. These organisations can include Scottish Enterprise, SDI, Scottish Agricultural College, Scottish Government, Smart Exporter, PTYBS, Business Mentoring Program, Adopt an Intern and other organisations.

3.4 Business Gateway Communication

All Business Gateway support to local companies is communicated via the Business Gateway National Marketing Unit, Falkirk Council has the opportunity to input local marketing via:-

Advertising in the Falkirk Herald or use of local radio stations. Regular campaigns focusing on start up or growth have been run over several weeks involving national media, online digital presence and outdoor activities such as buses or railway station posters.

Business Gateway leaflets and guides distributed to key Council public buildings and other services across the district.

Business Gateway e-zine and website www.bgateway.com which offers a positive resource providing information on start-up and growth services, training, information and referrals to other organisations.

Falkirk Council has a local page - <http://www.bgateway.com/local-offices/falkirk> providing information on our local offices, workshops, events, funding and local support.

Business Gateway has an App for its services which was launched in 2014.

The key results for the service are summarized below:

Start Up Businesses	April 2014- March 2015	April 2015 – Sept2015
Businesses Assisted	376	188
Forecast Jobs	780	414
Business types suggested include retail, professional services, personal services, and traditional trades		
Higher Value Starts	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept2015
Higher Value Start Up Businesses	39	19
Forecast Jobs Attributed to Higher Value starts	157	77
Start- up Workshops	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Workshops	65	33
Number attendees	157	97
Aftercare	April 2014-March 2015	April 2015-Sept2015
Number Businesses	414	202
Growth Advisory Services	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015- Sept2015
Number Companies Accepted	39	20
Anticipated Increased Turnover	51,106,000	26,328,000
Growth Workshops	April 2014-March 2015	April 2015- Sept 2015
Workshops	35	18
Attendees	245	114
Growth Pipeline	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of acceptances	22	8
Products Accessed	122	33
Anticipated increased Turnover	40,173,257	14,858,602
Direct relationship Management	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
DRM	4	1
Turnover	12, 980,940	5,000,000
Specialist Help	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Referrals	330	108

Customer Satisfaction Feedback	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – June 2015	July 2015 – September 2015
Customers who expressed overall satisfaction	81%	85%	91%
Customers who believed that their expectations had been met	77%	89%	78%
Customers who believed that the service was a benefit to their business	84%	90%	83%
Customers who expressed overall satisfaction in face to face contact	83%	100%	100%
Customers who expressed an	85%	100%	82%

overall satisfaction with a Business Adviser			
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4.0 SPECIALIST CONSULTANCY ADVICE FOR BUSINESSES

Out with the Business Gateway service the Council provides additional support to the SME sector. The following additional support has been successfully promoted.

- 4.1 Business Gateway Plus (Forth Valley): In July 2013 Falkirk Council secured additional ERDF funding of £293,000 to provide additional services which are designed to enhance the basic Growth Advisory service. The Business Gateway Plus (Forth Valley) project enables Business Gateway Forth Valley to provide a wider, more comprehensive package of business growth support across the area. The current Business Gateway model limits the provision of specialist one to one support to businesses with the potential to grow turnover of around £200K. The ERDF enabled the provision of additional specialist support to this client group. Following the successful award of ERDF, Business Gateway Plus, provides additional business support over and above that provided through the Business Gateway contract as follows:-

Expert Help allows businesses to access support from a specialist to sustain and develop their business. The support is up to 3 days consultancy advice from experienced, qualified professional experts from a wide range of sectors and industry backgrounds. The support can be used to assist with marketing, sales, procurement, strategy, organisational development, e-commerce or IT. The support is aimed at businesses with fewer than 50 staff who are aiming to grow their sales by around £200k in the next 2 years.

HR Advice and support; The Federation of Small Businesses identified in their report 'Micros Untapped' that many small businesses had aspirations to employ more staff but didn't have the knowledge and confidence to do this. As a direct response to this an HR Advice service was launched to support businesses that are taking on new employees with practical support such as contracts of employment and employee handbooks.

- 4.2 Supplier Development Programme: In addition to providing support to the above activities, Falkirk Council has committed to supporting and delivering the Supplier Development Programme. The Programme operates across twenty six local authority areas in Scotland delivering a range of specialist business support activities including the provision of advice, information, and training with the aim of assisting businesses to become more capable of accessing and competing for public sector contracts. events are being delivered on topics such as Is the Public Sector for You? , Find It Win It Keep It and Public Contracts Scotland. 103 businesses within the Falkirk area are registered with the programme with 16 local business attending events over the last year including several companies who secured Commonwealth Games contracts.

Supplier Development Programme	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – September
Webinars	18 Companies	8 Companies
Events Forth Valley	9 Events	3 Events

- 4.3 Social Media and e-commerce - In addition to the Business Gateway programme of training outlined above, Falkirk Council delivered workshops on social media covering Twitter, You Tube, Linked In and Facebook for business use. These popular free events were delivered by specialist trainers at the Stadium and run for half day and full day depending on the programme. From April 2014 – September 2015 42 social media training events took place with 318 attendees.
- 4.4 Web Audits: Where a business has a website but feels it is not delivering growth results, Falkirk Council provides resources and dedicated support to enable a web audit to be undertaken. This will identify how the site is performing and provide the business with a list of actions which can be implemented in order to secure improvements. From April 14 – September 15 50 Audits were completed.
- 4.5 Falkirk Council's 'Guide to Successful Retailing' workshops are a series of retail specific training courses which aim to improve the survival rates of small to medium sized retail businesses in the area. The courses have been developed to specifically meet the needs of those running a retail business and provide business owners with practical advice and support to assess their current business practices, identify improvements and with support, develop a plan that will help to take the business to the next level. Delivered in bite-sized chunks, the courses cover the key elements required for a successful business: Business Planning and Finance, Driving Sales and Buying and Merchandising. During the period April 14 – September 15 two Guide to Successful Retailing courses ran with 14 retailers attending.

5.0 FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO BUSINESSES

- 5.1 Falkirk Council recognises that access to finance for businesses can be a barrier to growth and since 1st October 2013 has promoted a suite of funding products.
- 5.2 The Small Business Grant Scheme was introduced by Falkirk Council on 1 October 2012 and is one of the ways in which Falkirk Council can help businesses invest for growth. The scheme is aimed at small businesses in the Falkirk area which need some support to undertake viable growth projects. The type of project expenditure eligible for a grant can include investment in business premises, machinery, equipment, systems, technology, innovation and market development. The maximum grant is 50% of the value of the project up to a maximum grant of £3000. Due to the level of demand the budget for 2014/15 was increased to £85,000. To target grant support most effectively and ensure that only projects that could really demonstrate the need for assistance, the eligibility criteria was amended to business with fewer than 10 employees or a turnover of less than £500,000
- 5.3 The BP Business Loan Fund provides unsecured loans of up to £10,000 to anyone considering starting up or growing their own business in the Falkirk Council area and cannot secure all of the required funds from other sources. BP Business Loans are awarded to applicants who can demonstrate an aspiration to grow or expand thereby creating jobs, identify opportunity in terms of markets and products, demonstrate capability in terms of skills and resources and a need for funding. All loans are on a discretionary basis, and the maximum amount is £10,000. The interest rate is 6% and can be repaid over 3 years. Some of the start-up companies assisted include a concrete mixing delivery business, a children's nursery, a beauty salon and a food and drink retail outlet. The current balance of the fund is c£159,000 with approx. £80,000 of loan funds due to be repaid.

The UK Government established a start up loan fund in Scotland in early 2014. This fund is available to help people start up in business by providing loan finance of up to £10,000 at an interest rate of 6%. Borrowers have to demonstrate they have been unsuccessful in securing bank funding – similar to the BP Loan, but can also benefit from a more competitive criteria with interest only repayment for the first year. From April 14 – September 15 one loan of £10,000 was accessed by a Falkirk client.

Given the similarities between this fund and the BP Loan fund it was proposed to continue running the two loan funds in parallel for a period of a year. This would allow the new loan fund to embed within Business Gateway suite of services and enable demand to be monitored for both funds. The overall demand for the SULCO loan was far less than anticipated and it did not have an impact on the BP Loan Fund. Thoughts are that the application procedure is quite an onerous an online process with more eligibility criteria and a lengthier process than the BP Loan Fund. A handful of clients were referred to the fund but only 1 made a successful application.. Business Gateway network is no longer actively involved in the application process and the fund is now managed entirely by an external body - DSL in Glasgow -to which we can make client referrals.

- 5.4 The East of Scotland Investment Fund (ESIF) offers loans of up to £100,000 to new and growing, small and medium sized businesses. The aim of this larger fund is to ensure that good, commercially viable proposals do not fail from a lack of access to finance and to encourage and support the creation, development and growth of businesses within Falkirk area. ESIF as a public sector owned fund can provide between 50-75% of the funding package required to help start up and grow businesses with the balance of the funding package provided by the private sector, usually from the owners, directors and the bank. The maximum repayment period is 60 months and the interest rate is 6%. The current balance of the funds available in Falkirk is £172,123.

Loans were awarded to MP Locums – a business supplying locums to NHS in Scotland and England, and Macloch Contracts, a specialized steel fabrication company involved in large construction projects throughout Scotland.

The balance of funds in the ESIF budget is £172,123. The ESIF will cease to operate in Dec 15 and loan balances will transfer over to the newly Formed Business Loans Scotland Ltd. A fund set up to attract ERDF monies with the majority of Local authorities participating in the scheme.

Small Business Grant Scheme	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Grants	30	12
Total Value	81,263	22,872
Private Sector Investment	156,661	197,101
Additional Jobs Created	40	25
BP Loan Fund	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Loans	4	0
Total Funding awarded	33500	0
Secured Jobs	13	0
Additional Jobs	48	0
ESIF	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Loans	2	0
Number of Jobs Created	14	0
Amount of loan awarded	100,000	0

6.0 FALKIRK AREA BUSINESS SUPPORT PROMOTION, NETWORKING & COMMUNICATON

In addition to the delivery of business support activities and national Business Gateway communications, a number of promotional social media and events activities within the structure of the Falkirk Business Panel have been delivered by the Growth & Investment Unit:-

Falkirk Annual Conferences	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Events	1	1
Number of Attendees	203	128
Falkirk Business Panel Update Events	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Events	2	0
Number of Attendees	193	
Falkirk Business Exhibition	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Events	1	1
Number of Exhibitors	53	41
Number of Visitors	361	309
Business Breakfasts	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2015 – Sept 2015
Number of Attendees		45
Logistics and Transportation		1
Number of Attendees		23
Chemical Sciences		1
Number of Attendees		45
New Energy		1
Number of Attendees	38	
Food & Drink	1	
Number of Attendees	19	
Engineering Opportunities	1	

- A recently introduced a monthly Visit Falkirk e-zine which 150 tourism related businesses subscribe to.
- Monthly Falkirk Business E-zine is sent to 3,170 subscribers.
- Business Falkirk newsletter is now being produced twice a year with an electronic version sent out to the 3170 and all Falkirk council properties and partner organizations.
- Social Media Communication including Business pages on www.falkirk.gov.uk being updated in advance of roll out of new Council website; undergoing comprehensive overhaul of content;
- www.twitter.com/falkirkbiz now established as an additional channel to engage with the business community – grown from zero to 1145 followers since June 2013.
- My Futures in Falkirk LinkedIn Group, increased membership to 750 members with daily active discussions on business topics, events and announcements.
- Quarterly tourism networking events being held – inaugural meeting at Helix Visitor Centre in Nov 14. Over 45 businesses attending.
- Promotion of Procurement Clinics with the Purchasing Service of Falkirk Council . (7 clinics with 22 consultations)

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Growth & Investment Unit has now established itself as the key hub and one stop shop for Business support in Falkirk. It has been successful in securing and delivering new programmes and products on behalf of partner organisations like SE for Falkirk businesses (for example the Broadband Voucher Scheme and The Digital Voucher Scheme), in addition to delivering a significant range of Business Gateway and Falkirk Council support. Joint working with other Council services such as Planning, ETU, environmental health and trading standards has also been achieved to the benefit of local businesses.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

**Subject: SITE DISPOSAL, MURNIN ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE,
BONNYBRIDGE**
Meeting: EXECUTIVE
Date: 23 FEBRUARY 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to declare surplus and dispose of a 0.18 acre site at Murnin Road Industrial Estate, Bonnybridge (plan attached) to Storage UK Ltd.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Storage UK Ltd is a family owned and operated business, formed 40 years ago, specialising in storage, handling, distribution and other associated logistics activities particularly in niche markets. It is based in Seabegs Road, Bonnybridge and currently employs 65 people.
- 2.2 The subject site is an undeveloped part of Murnin Road Industrial Estate and sits immediately adjacent to Storage UK Ltd's landholding.

3.0 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Storage UK Ltd has an urgent requirement for more storage space at its site to satisfy the demand of its biggest client. The company has intimated its concern that it could lose this client if it is unable to provide additional storage facility to meet this requirement and that this would have a direct impact on jobs. However it is envisaged that a further 15 jobs could be created through this expansion.
- 3.2 In order to meet this requirement Storage UK proposes to build a new 15,000 sq ft storage facility at a cost of circa £750,000. It has identified the subject site as being ideal for this development.
- 3.3 The subject site has been independently valued at £14,400 by The District Valuers Office.
- 3.4 Local members have been advised of this proposal.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL

Policy Implications

5.1 None

Legal Implications

5.2 None.

Financial Implications

5.3 The proposed disposal will result in a capital receipt of £14,400.

Planning Implications

5.4 The site is zoned for industrial purposes in the Local Development Plan. The transaction will be subject to securing planning consent for the development proposed.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that Members agrees:

- i) to declare the site extending to 0.18 acres at Murnin Road Industrial Estate Bonnybridge surplus to operational requirement.
- ii) To dispose of the site to Storage UK Ltd for a sum of £14,400.

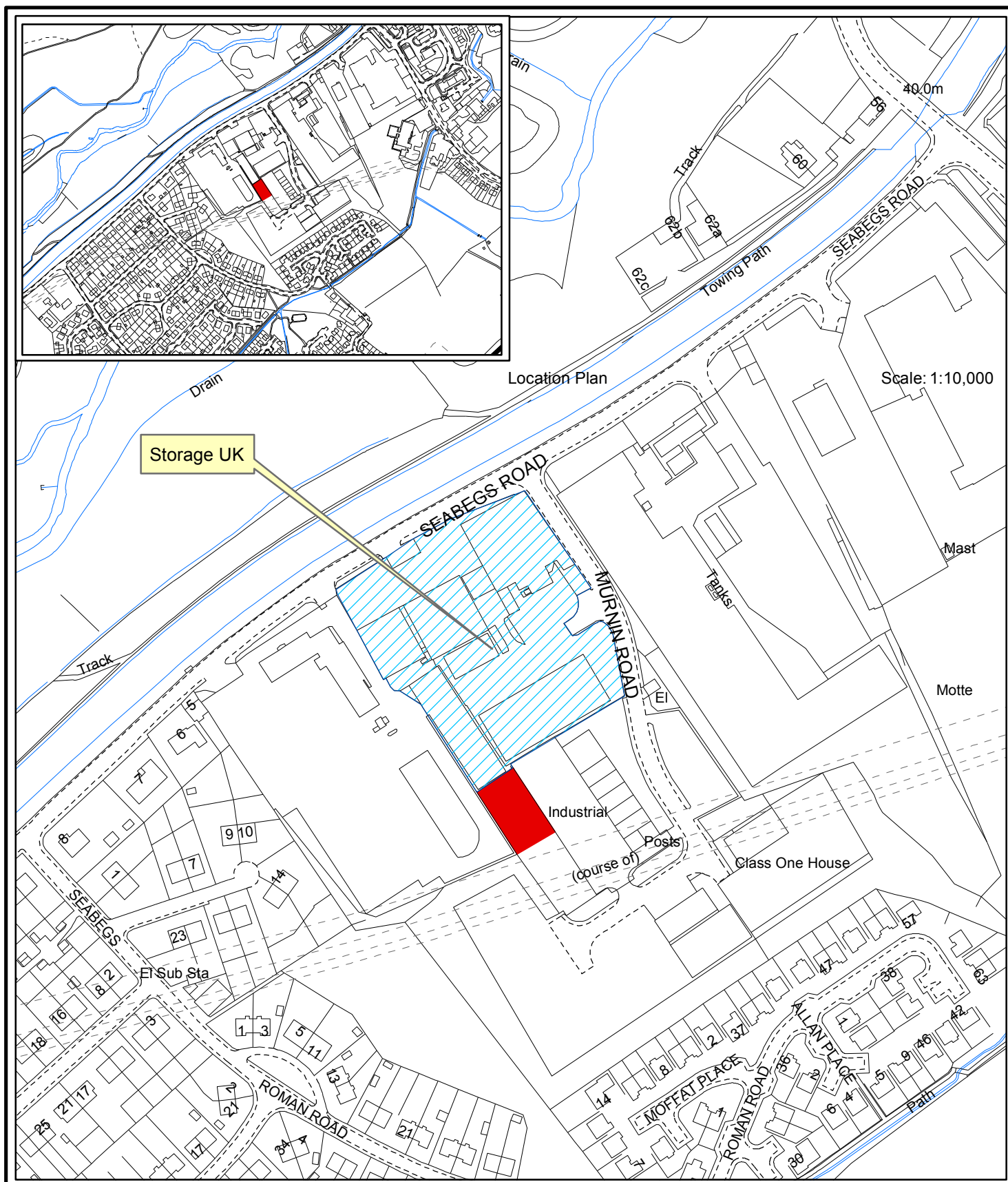
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Director of Development Services

10th February 2016

Contact Officer: John Smith x 4973

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL

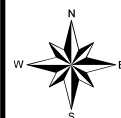


Falkirk Council

Development Services

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Scale: 1:2,500



Subject

0.0743Ha (0.184Ac) Murnin Road Bonnybridge

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