Agenda Item 3

Minute

Draft

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held within Grangemouth Education Unit on Tuesday 4 November 2025 at 10.00 a.m.

Councillors: David Aitchison
Claire Aitken
Margaret Anslow
Claire Mackie Brown
Fiona Collie
Jim Flynn
Gordon Forrest
Brian McCabe (Convener)
Ann Ritchie
Jim Robertson

Officers: Malcolm Bennie, Director of Place Services
Gillian Campbell, Quality Improvement Officer
Deborah Davidson, Head of Education
Caroline Doherty, Head of Community Services
Philip Heaton, Alcohol & Drug Partnership Lead Officer
Marie Keirs, HSCP Chief Finance Officer
Sarah McCulley, Learning & Employability Service Manager
Richard McFarlane, Fairer Falkirk Co-Ordinator
Ewan McWilliams, Members' Services Co-Ordinator
Calum MacDonald, Performance & Quality Assurance Manager
Gayle Martin, Education Support Officer
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Jill Pringle, Head of Education
Amanda Templeman, Chief Finance Officer
Martin Thom, Head of Specialist Services
Carly Toland, Committee Officer
Gail Woodcock, Chief Officer, IJB

Also attending: Councillor Cecil Meiklejohn, Leader of the Council
Councillor Iain Sinclair, Portfolio Holder

In the absence of the Convener, the Democratic Services Manager sought nominations for a Chair for this meeting. Councillor Aitchison nominated Councillor McCabe. There being no further nominations, Councillor McCabe then assumed the Chair for the meeting.

S34. Apologies

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Provost Bissett, Depute Provost Balfour and Councillors Binnie, Kelly and Patrick.

S35. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

S36. Minute

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 7 October 2025 was approved.

S37. Rolling Action Log

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

The Democratic Services Manager advised of a change in reporting date in relation to Item 719. This would now be presented to the Committee in February 2026.

Decision

The Committee noted the Rolling Action Log.

S38. Order of Business

The Convener varied the order of business from that stated on the agenda. The following items are recorded in the order in which they were considered at the meeting.

S39. Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership Update

The Committee considered a report by the Chief Officer and Director of Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership which provided a summary of the performance of the Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). The report covered progress since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee on 12 November 2024 and presented the following reports:

- Annual Assurance Statements provided to the Integration Joint Board (IJB) from the Performance, Audit and Assurance Committee (PAAC)

- Internal Audit Annual Assurance Report 2024/25
- IJB 2024/25 Annual Unaudited Annual Accounts 2024/25
- Annual Performance Report 2024/25
- Performance Monitoring Report and Local Government Benchmarking Framework
- External inspection reports
- Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP): Progress with Medication Assisted Treatment MAT Standards

The Committee requested further information in relation to changes made to the organisational structure of the IJB. The Chief Officer advised that, upon taking up her role in April 2024, IJB members had shared feedback about how the organisation of the Board could be improved. A series of development sessions were held to better understand the views of Board members. This resulted in the number of IJB meetings increasing from 4 to 6 per year. The decision was also made to amalgamate the former Clinical Care & Governance Committee and the former Audit Committee. These committees previously each met 4 times per year. They became 1 Performance, Audit & Assurance Committee which met 6 times per year. These changes provided the appropriate regularity and assurance Board members required.

The Committee asked for an update on the external audit of the IJB accounts, which the report stated was delayed. The HSCP Chief Finance Officer advised that the audited accounts had now been received, and no issues were identified. She noted that the delay was due to capacity within Audit Scotland.

The Committee asked how the IJB would be reducing its reliance on non-recurring funding, and what the risks were if its financial position were to deteriorate further. The HSCP Chief Finance Officer advised that there was a risk share arrangement in place with the IJB's partners of just under £4m. She highlighted that there was a projected overspend of £6.2m. If the IJB's position was to deteriorate, it would be required to invoke its risk share arrangement, alongside using contingency reserves. She further explained that officers were in the process of formulating recurring savings proposals to bring forward to the IJB. The financial position was regularly monitored and discussed with management, partners and the Finance Oversight Group.

The Committee requested further information on Emergency Department waiting times. The Performance & Quality Assurance Manager advised that this indicator had fluctuated considerably over the years. Prior to the pandemic, this indicator performed well nationally but had not since recovered to this standard. As a follow-up question, the Committee asked what assurances could be provided in relation to this indicator. The Chief Officer reminded the Committee that Emergency Department waiting times reflected how the whole system was coping, and finding solutions in the current climate would be challenging. The Committee asked whether there

would be funding available to support this. The Chief Officer advised that specific funding had been provided by the NHS to support the flow of care from hospital to home.

The Committee asked for further information on the rise in alcohol-related hospital admissions. The ADP Lead Officer advised that a rise in alcohol use had been observed in Falkirk over the last few years which was in line with national trends. He noted that it was likely that this translated into a rise in hospital admissions. The Performance & Quality Assurance Manager advised that a strategic needs assessment of the alcohol recovery system was being undertaken, and this would inform the direction of the new Strategic Plan.

The Committee asked about the rehabilitation facilities available for those with drug and alcohol dependencies in Falkirk. The ADP Lead Officer advised that the rehabilitation budget was managed by NHS Forth Valley and placements were funded using ring-fenced annual funding. He noted that this funding depleted relatively quickly, but additional funding could be applied for. He noted that it was the ambition of the ADP to minimise barriers to rehabilitation.

The Committee noted the challenges outlined in the conclusion of the report, including growing demand, an aging population, people living with more complex health conditions, the impact of the pandemic, recruitment and retention challenges, and financial constraints. It asked about the plans in place to deal with these challenges in the long term. The Chief Officer advised that current Strategic Plan would end in 2026, and a new plan was in development. The new Strategic Plan would address these challenges and outline a future operating model which would transform service delivery. She acknowledged that changes in service delivery may be difficult to adjust to, but appropriate engagement and consultation would be undertaken so service-users could be kept continuously informed to understand why changes have been made.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Collie, noted that despite the challenges set out in the report, inspections showed that the performance of services in Falkirk was strong. She extended thanks to officers for driving forward change in the current challenging circumstances.

Decision

The Committee noted the report and progress by the HSCP in meeting its priorities in the Strategic Plan.

S40. Following the Public Pound – Poverty and Equalities

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Transformation, Communities and Corporate Services which provided an update on external funding to support community development and capacity building for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, for LGBT Youth Scotland, Citizens Advice Bureaux, Grangemouth & Bo'ness Denny & Dunipace Falkirk, Armed Forces Project – Denny Citizens Advice Bureau, and Macmillan Money Matters.

LGBT Youth Scotland

The Learning & Employability Service Manager provided an overview of the monitoring report for LGBT Youth Scotland. The Committee noted that, in the absence of the relevant Monitoring Officer, the Learning & Employability Service Manager would answer questions from members on his behalf.

The Committee noted that the organisation's annual funding had increased from £29,708 to £30,000 from the previous reporting period, but it had ceased to receive support-in-kind which was valued at £1,500. The Committee asked what the impact of this had been. The Learning & Employability Service Manager advised that, despite the value of its funding decreasing, the organisation had continued to deliver positive outcomes for its service-users through greater partnership working and shared resources.

The Committee asked about the extent to which other local authorities funded LGBT Youth Scotland. The Learning & Employability Service Manager advised that this information would be provided following the meeting.

The Committee asked about the total number of young people supported by the organisation. The Learning & Employability Service Manager advised that 34 young people were supported through youth groups, and 40 in one-to-one sessions. However, the impact of the service extended beyond this, for example to the families of service-users.

The Committee asked how the organisation encouraged young people to engage with the service. The Learning & Employability Service Manager advised that LGBT Youth Scotland worked with other youth groups in the area which enabled cross-referrals. She noted that the organisation was commissioned by Community Learning & Development, and therefore received direct referrals from community groups, education, the Employment &Training Unit and through word of mouth.

The Committee asked how the organisation worked with service-users to ensure the services being delivered were reflective of their needs. The Learning & Employability Service Manager advised that young people were heavily involved in the codesign of session themes and discussion points.

She noted that, in the first 6 months of this year, 50% of service-users assisted in the delivery of sessions.

The Committee requested further information on the outcomes of service-users after they had disengaged from the organisation. The Learning & Employability Service Manager advised that outcomes were tracked for 52 weeks after disengagement. She explained that many of the young people moved on to other youth or adult services in the Council so could be monitored for longer. However, she noted that the organisation did not tend to monitor the outcomes of previous service-users beyond 52 weeks.

Citizens Advice Bureaux: Grangemouth and Bo'ness, Denny & Dunipace and Falkirk

The Monitoring Officer, Richard McFarlane, provided an overview of the monitoring report for the three Citizens Advice Bureaux.

The Committee asked about impact on the service should funding be reduced. The Fairer Falkirk Co-Ordinator advised that any cut in funding would have a negative impact on staffing levels and the ability of staff to recruit train and support volunteers. This would mean a reduction in the capacity of the bureaux which would put additional pressure on the Council's in-house advice service.

The Committee noted that, between 2023/24 and 2024/25, the number of clients seen by the Denny bureau decreased and asked why this was. The Fairer Falkirk Co-ordinator advised that the bureau had noted a rise in the complexity of cases. Clients were often presenting with multiple issues which required more time and specialist input, which meant fewer clients could be seen. He also noted that the demographic of clients in Denny differed to other bureaux. The Denny bureau conducted more home visits and outreach work in order to support Strathcarron Hospice, which further added to the complexity of cases.

Armed Services Project – Denny Citizens Advice Bureau

The Monitoring Officer, Ewan McWilliams, provided an overview of the monitoring report for the Armed Services Project, operating within Denny Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Committee asked how the service managed with one member of staff. The Members' Services Co-Ordinator advised that the service managed well with its current staffing levels, however he noted that this had become more challenging post-pandemic, as home visits had increased. The Committee noted the importance of the service for members of the armed services community.

MacMillan Money Matters

The Monitoring Officer, Richard McFarlane, provided an overview of the monitoring report for MacMillan Money Matters which was a partnership between Stirling and Falkirk Councils, NHS Forth Valley and MacMillan Cancer Support.

The Committee noted that the number of clients seen by the service had increased but funding had remained static, and asked about the organisation's planning in relation to funding. The Fairer Falkirk Co-Ordinator advised that this was on the organisation's radar and funding was reviewed and monitored on a regular basis.

The Leader of the Council commended the organisations for their important work in reducing poverty and inequalities in Falkirk.

Decision

The Committee noted the report and acknowledged progress by the organisations in meeting the Council's priorities.

The Committee adjourned at 11:20am and reconvened at 11:40am.

S41. Specific Grant Funding (Counselling)

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education Services which provided an update on the counselling services provided in Falkirk Council schools, resourced by Counselling Through Schools funding from the Scottish Government, and highlighted additional mental health and wellbeing support provided via Community Mental Health and Wellbeing funding.

The Committee requested further information on feedback from pupils and parents regarding the service. The Quality Improvement Officer advised that evaluations were conducted regularly, and feedback was generally positive. She noted counselling in schools had been particularly beneficial for P6 and P7 pupils, who previously had a very low uptake of the service.

The Committee noted that this funding was for pupils aged ten and above and asked about the support available to pupils under ten. The Quality Improvement Officer advised counselling was still available for children under ten, however younger pupils tended to respond better to interventions through the Community Mental Health team, as these were more interactive.

The Committee asked about gender makeup of pupils accessing the service. The Quality Improvement Officer advised that the service had seen stronger engagement from males, but the majority of those who accessed counselling were female. She highlighted that this didn't necessarily pose a cause for concern, as it was common for male to seek other avenues of support.

The Committee noted that pupils in S2 and S3 accessed the service in higher numbers than any other year group, and asked for further information on this. The Quality Improvement Officer advised that this was a trend across Community Mental Health services.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Sinclair, commended education staff for their important work in supporting the emotional wellbeing of young people in Falkirk.

Decision

The Committee noted the range of activity, benefit and impact of Counselling Through Schools funding on the young people in Falkirk Council.

S42. Pupil Equity Funding Progress Report

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Education Services which provided an update on Falkirk Schools' Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) progress to date and planning for 2025/26.

The Committee asked how changes in the attainment gap were monitored. The Education Support Officer advised that every local authority set Stretch Aims, which set ambitious goals in relation to improving attainment and the poverty-related attainment gap. She noted that every school worked towards these aims, and the outcomes of pupils in every quintile were tracked to observe the impact of the work being done.

The Committee asked about the sustainability of PEF. The Education Support Officer advised that this funding was secured until 2027, but it was not yet known what it would look like post-2027. She highlighted that, since the introduction of PEF in 2017, it had become intrinsic to the work schools do on an every-day basis. She noted that a large proportion of PEF went towards supporting a level of staffing which would not be sustainable without this funding. The Education Support Officer stressed that the training, teaching practices, relationships and resources acquired as a result of PEF would have a lasting impact on pupils and families.

The Committee noted that PEF was calculated based on the number of pupils claiming free school meals and asked how schools encouraged uptake of this in order to increase funding. The Education Support Officer advised that PEF had been fixed for a number of years, however schools worked closely with families to support them to complete applications for free school meals. She noted that schools had strong partnerships with the Council's benefits team, who would often visit schools to provide support to families. She explained that, although funding was calculated based on the number of pupils claiming free school meals, the work funded by PEF was accessible to any pupil who needed it.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Sinclair, noted the vitality of PEF in supporting staff to deliver interventions which address the challenges faced by children and young people affected by poverty.

Decision

The Committee noted Falkirk schools' Pupil Equity Funding progress to date and planning for 2025/26 and the progress that had been made so far in reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.