



MEETING OF FIFE COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 17TH JUNE, 2021

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7 - QUESTION TIME

QUESTION 1 FROM COUNCILLOR DAVE DEMPSEY

Why were Police Scotland and the Council actively canvassing information on newly applied stickers on lampposts in the Viewforth Avenue area of Kirkcaldy when stickers from the 2014 Referendum remain on Council signs to this day?

Answer

I was unaware that there were newly applied stickers on lampposts in the Viewforth Avenue area of Kirkcaldy nor was I aware that there are stickers from the 2014 Referendum on Council signs. Consequently, I am not aware of why Police Scotland were actively canvassing information on the former, although it may be that Police Scotland was concerned about the message that was being promoted but had no concern about the message promoted by the latter. In any event, in the circumstances, Councillor Dempsey may choose to direct his query to Police Scotland.

Supplementary Question

What steps is Councillor Vettrains taking to improve his level of awareness?

Answer

Provost, as far as increasing my level of awareness is concerned, all my time is taken up trying to do so for that for which I am responsible. Lighting columns and street signs are the responsibility of the Council's Transportation Spokesperson, whose level of awareness, I have no doubt, is up to date.

QUESTION 2 FROM COUNCILLOR JONNY TEPP

Does the administration think that 20MPH speed limits should be scrapped and increased to 30MPH to 'align the mandatory limit to drivers' perceptions'?

Answer

No.

Supplementary (J Tepp)

Are you happy we consult with the communities or can we do more?

Answer

Agree that consultation and engagement was important and we try to find solutions that make roads safer.

Supplementary (JA Liston)

When will 20mph streets in St Andrews be implemented?

Answer

I will check and get back to you.

QUESTION 3 FROM COUNCILLOR DAVE DEMPSEY

What are the pros and cons of including in reports to committees a section on the impact on those for whom the Council is a Corporate Parent?

Answer

Background:

Care experienced people can suffer from an 'inequality of outcome' impacting on life chances due to a range of factors .

Fife Council are a corporate parent has a legal duty to assess, understand and deliver effective services to care experienced people.

The Pros:

By making care experienced people an integral part of the EqIA, services will be compelled to engage with a highly vulnerable section of society.

The EqIA is about getting services right the first time and as such it could become a tool for change.

Fife Council could better evidence service impact and allow for more accurate reporting of improvement over time.

Better service design will lead to a reduction in the number of children being looked after away from their families.

Meeting the needs of children and their families within effective universal services will reduce reliance on intensive and emergency services.

Safely maintaining children at home will reduce the costs associated with high cost placements

Cons:

Considering the needs of care experienced people could arguably take more time for service and system change due to the complexity .

Supplementary

If and when will this happen?

Answer

Will check with Head of Social Work and let you know.

QUESTION 4 FROM COUNCILLOR DAVE DEMPSEY

The recent Internal Audit Report on the Scotland Excel Procurement Project appears to show that the stated objective of the project was such that it isn't and never was possible to determine whether or not that objective had been met. As that's clearly unsatisfactory, what steps are being taken to ensure that such a situation doesn't recur?

Answer

The audit referred to was requested by the convener of Standards and Audit Committee and was completed by Audit Services in April 2021 and discussed at the Standards and Audit Committee on 3rd June 2021.

Far from being unsatisfactory the audit opinion stated:

"In our opinion, the system of controls under review for this Programme within Revenue and Commercial Services merits a Grade one. We consider that the materiality of the area that has been audited warrants a Grade four, accordingly we assess the overall risk as low"

Whilst testing over 40 areas of internal control, audit services made only two recommendations, both of which have been accepted and actioned by officers. The first recommendation related to changes to business cases and has been picked up in the "lesson learned" for the program insofar as members should be informed where the outcomes are changed post agreement of the business case.

The second recommendation was to monitor and report the benefits achieved by the project in line with the benefits realisation policy. Extensive recording of procurement related savings and benefits was developed over the course of the programme. The project was delivered in in partnership and financial benefits of the project were to be achieved through joint working by the Council's procurement service alongside Scotland Excel. On this basis it is not possible to determine benefits solely relating to the work of Scotland Excel. What can be demonstrated is the significant increase in procurement related benefits compared to those delivered before the project began.

The financial benefits were a part of a much wider project to transform the Procurement Service in Fife. The project is still ongoing and is delivering benefits in excess of the original target of £16 million as well as successfully completing 13 other projects to develop all procurement staff within the organisation, to ensure that the service delivers a first-class service to directorates, suppliers, and customers alike.

The benefits of the project and engagement of Scotland Excel (the Local Government centre of procurement expertise) will continue to deliver results for Fife Council and our stakeholders for many years to come and should be viewed as a monumental success and not unsatisfactory as suggested by this question.

QUESTION 5 FROM COUNCILLOR DAVID J ROSS

Many sports clubs were disappointed by The decision not to allow external activities to recommence in primary schools when Fife moved to level two Covid restrictions. As Fife it's now at level one what progress has been made to ensure that internal sports and physical activities can resume in primary schools after the summer holidays.

Answer

There has been no formal decision, by E&CS, not to allow external, or indeed internal, activities to resume across our school buildings. We are, however, adhering to all current guidance regarding when, and what types of, activities can now take place. Additionally, we need to consider individual school contexts, and the protocols within the schools in relation to the Covid risk assessment.

We will continue to adhere to the guidance that is in place, based on the protection levels, and will consider any individual requests received based on the school context.

QUESTION 6 FROM COUNCILLOR DARREN WATT

Fife Sports and Leisure Trust currently charge £1.30 for food waste bags at local leisure centres. There are no such charges at Fife Council facilities or at libraries managed by Fife Cultural Trust. I understand Trusts are operated autonomously from Fife Council; however, this is yet another confusing and unnecessary barrier for the vast majority who want to recycle responsibly and efficiently. For the benefit of fellow Councillors and the wider public, can you please share insight into this ludicrous situation?

Answer

All leisure centres (except Duloch) currently sell food waste bags. Duloch food waste bag are currently being issues free as part of a pilot and this was the decision of the Environment Protective Services and Community Safety Committee made in February 2019.

I believe that FSLT do not set the price on the bags as it is the Climate Change & Zero Waste Team; we get a small fee for each bag sold within a leisure centre. We will investigate the actual sales for food waste bags across FSLT venues and clarify the position with regards to charging (or not) and if the pilot can be rolled out across Fife.

Supplementary

Will FC work alongside FSLT to ensure the food bags can be supplied free of charge?

Answer

Yes

QUESTION 7 FROM COUNCILLOR DARREN WATT

While we can all agree there are many reasons for fly tipping, there are no excuses, however, this brings little comfort to communities, residents, businesses, and private landowners who are often unfairly burdened with the costs to clean up. In the last six months, how many fixed penalty fines were given to “environmental vandals” by Fife Council and how much has been collected?

Answer

Provost, I see Environmental Vandalism to cover Illegal Dumping, Littering, Dog Fouling and Graffiti, on that basis, in the last six months: 33 Fixed Penalty Notices have been issued in

respect of Illegal Dumping, of which 5, so far, have been paid; 8 have been issued in respect of littering, of which 3, so far, have been paid and 7 have been issued in respect of Dog Fouling, of which 5, so far, have been paid.

QUESTION 8 FROM COUNCILLOR JONNY TEPP

Is it the case that there has been no mechanical street cleaning for the last 2 years across Fife ? How many complaints about the cleanliness of streets have been received during that time and how has that effected our score under the LEAMS scheme?

Answer

Provost, it is not the case that there has been no mechanical sweeping in Fife for the last two years. I am advised that there have been 21 complaints about Street Cleaning in the last 12 months, which has not affected the Council's LEAMS score. (the Local Environmental Audit and Management System), which takes no account of complaints.

Supplementary Question

What do these figures mean to the public and what is the Council doing to improve the situation?

Answer

I don't imagine that the figures will mean anything to the public. AS far as improving the situation is concerned, in consultation with the relevant Executive Directors and Heads of Service, I am looking to develop an Environmental Vandalism Strategy, which will improve the situation across Fife and which I hope will be considered by the Environment and Protective Services Sub-committee later this year.

QUESTION 9 FROM COUNCILLOR JAMES CALDER

How many Fife children have been detained unlawfully either in Fife or outwith Fife between August 2018 and July 2019 following the investigation by the Scottish Children and Young Peoples Commissioner?

Answer

I am not aware of Fife Council detaining any children unlawfully. I am assuming this is in relation to secure care and would share that any child subject to secure care has a range of checks and balances applied:

emergency admission - criteria met

- CSWO decision making and agreement to secure
- Head of Secure Unit decision making and agreement
- Children's hearing within 72 hours
- right of appeal

Planned admission to secure - criteria met:

- Via Children's hearing and
- to be agreed or not by CSWO

Supplementary

I assume none of the 118 children detained were in Fife?

Answer

Yes. Less than 5 children have been admitted to secure accommodation.

QUESTION 10 FROM COUNCILLOR TIM BRETT

How many contracts have been let by Fife Council since the start of the Pandemic that were not put out to tender? What was the value of those contracts , what were they for and why was this done?

Answer

9 different contracts (some multiple contracts within, e.g. PPE, bus contracts) were committed without being put to tender since the beginning of the pandemic. These collectively total £11m and each of these has been approved by the relevant service and Head of Revenue & Commercial Services/Procurement Service Manager as required by the Scheme of Tender Procedure.

The areas covered and brief reasons were:

PPE & Cleaning Materials – due to urgency/pandemic response

Windows and Doors – Pandemic/Service need

Carnegie Leisure pool – Restricted market

Travel – School Bus Services (5 different routes) – Urgency/Pandemic response

Kelty Day Care Service – Negotiated extension to contract due to pandemic

Replacement Bathrooms – Direct award until re-tender

Purchase of Leased Huts – Best Value Decision

Supplementary

What were the extra costs?

Answer

Don't have this information but officers can provide further detail if requested.

QUESTION 11 FROM COUNCILLOR BILL PORTEOUS

Is the Council experiencing any difficulties in obtaining materials or supplies for any services due to Brexit or the Pandemic. If so what are the shortages for and how long are we having to wait for items to be delivered?

Answer

Construction

Products shortages are showing in:

Timber, Steel, Copper, Plastics, Cement, Aggregates, Bricks, Screws, Fixings, Roof tiles, Plumbing Items, Sanitaryware & Shower Enclosures

Impacting all areas of construction.

High demand for products, shipping and containers are all impacting cost and lead times on these items.

Working with current contractors for construction materials has helped mitigate this through forward planning. Where contracted suppliers are unable to provide items, Procurement have been working with other local suppliers to help mitigate.

The current situation is dynamic with lead times and costs changing on weekly Basis. The situation is likely to get worse with more acute shortages and price increases expected as disruption likely to continue into next year.

Corporate/Facilities Management

Areas of significant concern at commencement of pandemic included PPE, cleaning items, food and grocery items. Concern for all these areas caused initially due to the scarcity of supply and global demands for these products at the height of the pandemic. Supply has generally stabilised, with the exception of PPE, supply is still disrupted and pricing is still a lot higher than they were pre-pandemic.

Environment/Fleet

National shortage of external hire vehicles and poor service/repairs backup.

There is an issue with semiconductor chips worldwide which is affecting all vehicle builds. Vehicle warranty and dealership repairs are all taking more time which is increasing down time.

We are also experiencing delays on vehicle parts. Time scales can be days to months.

Environment - Experienced problems in sourcing 0-20mm gravel for landfill cell construction at Lochhead, but have been able to switch to 0-40mm as a suitable alternative.

Security, ICT

Some delays remain present in ICT hardware – lead times are longer than usual.

Security is currently impacted by additional customs charges for magnetic locks related to door entry systems

Travel & Transportation

There appears to be a taxi driver shortage as many who had been furloughed got alternative driving jobs with supermarkets, Amazon etc and have chosen to remain in those new posts and not return to taxi driving.

QUESTION 12 FROM COUNCILLOR DONALD LOTHIAN

East Renfrewshire Council estimate they have saved local people over £3M from scams through their Confidence at Home scheme which has handed out 943 true Call blockers to older and vulnerable people. What arrangements do we have in Fife to protect our elderly and vulnerable residents from similar scams?

Answer

Provost, the Council's Trading Standards resource regularly provides information to the community regarding scams via social media and the local press. This information includes details of current scams and about how and where to get help. That work is proactively augmented by education in the form of scam prevention talks/presentations for interested groups, which last about an hour. The overall aim of all that work is to empower people to feel confident that they won't be caught out by scammers.

The Council also receives a large volume of direct client referrals from partner agencies including Advice Direct Scotland, Police Scotland, and the National Trading Standards Scams Team. These referrals concern individuals who are believed to be either vulnerable to, or already targeted by, scammers. In every case, as soon as possible, every one of these people is contacted directly by the Councils Trading Standards Officers and offered support and information tailored to their particular needs.

The practical help that is offered to individuals, which, where necessary, includes support from the Social Work Service, includes:

- chatting with the client to give advice about their situation, which is often all that is required;
- providing the client with a safeguarding information leaflet which gives comprehensive advice on how to manage finances;
- giving general buying advice which includes information about legal rights, for example, in connection with cancelling orders and detailing steps they can take to avoid contracting with rogue traders;
- installing free call-blockers for those who are being inundated with nuisance telephone calls;
- providing 'No Cold Callers' stickers for clients to put up in their door or windows. I am advised, if a tradesman knocks on a door that has one of these stickers visible, that it is an offence in terms of the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008;
- encouraging and/or facilitating the client to become a 'Friend Against Scams'. This is one of the National Trading Standards Scams Team's 'Friends Against Scams' initiatives where members of the public are given training on scam awareness;
- asking the client to sign up as a 'Scam Marshal'. This is another 'Friends Against Scams' initiative and is specifically aimed at people who have received excessive amounts of scam mail through the post and who want to fight back and take a stand. and finally
- encouraging the client to sign up to receive the Trading Standards Scotland 'Scam Share Bulletin', which is a weekly e-bulletin detailing the latest phone, email and online scams affecting Scottish Consumers.

QUESTION 13 FROM COUNCILLOR JONNY TEPP

Has any research been carried out to consider whether it would be possible to heat homes by warm water from flooded coal mines in Fife?

Answer

This has been considered as a heat source to run heat pumps. The wider renewable / district heating working group including Property and Housing Service staff retain this topic as an area of interest but currently activity is focused on the district systems in Dunfermline and Glenrothes which are currently delivering low carbon heat to public buildings and domestic properties. Currently an extension of the Glenrothes network is being considered with a business case being compiled and funding options being assessed.

Mines water provide a consistent and abundant source of heat to be utilised by heat pumps but have issues of contamination and toxins in the mines water that require to me mitigated. Whether mines water is pumped to the surface to allow the heat to be drawn off or if the mines water heat is extracted from a circulating closed loop there are additional maintenance and capital costs incurred due to the corrosive elements in the mines water.

QUESTION 14 FROM COUNCILLOR TIM BRETT

How many EU citizens have successfully applied to remain in Fife under the EU settlement Scheme? Do we know what proportion of EU Citizens in Fife that represents?

Answer

The Government used to publish monthly stats by local authority but seem only to be publishing quarterly stats now with the monthly stats now only covering the 4 UK nations. The latest local authority stats are available to 31st March 2021 as follows:

Total concluded application:	13,940
Settled status:	7,640
Pre-settled status	5,860
Other outcomes:	440

We don't know how many EU citizens are living in Fife as that will be a self declaration and DWP will only have figures of people registered for work so not accurate.

Supplementary

Do we know what happens to anyone who has not registered by the deadline?

Answer

Will check and advise.

QUESTION 15 FROM COUNCILLOR JANE ANN LISTON

Does the Council have any plans to increase the speed limit on roads with a current 20mph limit to 30mph because motorists are ignoring it?

Answer

See response to Question 2.

QUESTION 16 FROM COUNCILLOR JANE ANN LISTON

Does Fife Council consider that not funding the extra year for pupils deferring primary school entry if they attend private nurseries is consistent with the concepts of funding following the child and getting it right for every child?

Answer

For those children with January and February birthdays, and whose parents have made the decision to defer primary school entry, funding is available to access an extra year of ELC at a private nursery, voluntary sector service or childminder.

In line with the current admissions policy, for those children for whom a discretionary deferral has been agreed and for whom no extra funding is available to facilitate that extra year in nursery, the agreed ELC is provided in a local authority provision. Careful consideration is always given to how best to support children who are benefiting from a discretionary deferral and appropriate plans are put in place.

Currently deferrals for children with birthdays between August and December continue to be at the discretion of the local authority. As legislation changes regarding deferrals, and associated funding is brought forward, these children will be able to access the extra year of ELC at local authority nurseries, private and voluntary sector services and childminders.

Supplementary

Is it possible to do as Edinburgh City Council have done with regard to deferrals?

Answer

No plans to follow Edinburgh at the present time.

QUESTION 17 FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA HOLT

What does Fife Council spend on its annual subscription to Holyrood Magazine and on posting the magazine to 72 councillors monthly? Given that I would guess very few councillors have the time to read this publication from cover to cover, is this really the best way of spending council resources when for several years now Fife library-users have been deprived of the opportunity to read newspapers in libraries?

Answer

Subscription to the magazine is free and is posted out direct from the magazine so no cost to us.

QUESTION 18 FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA HOLT

The SNP were re-elected last month on a manifesto promise of a £60million playpark renewal fund to renew every playpark in Scotland. Volunteers in St Monans have been working their socks off to fundraise for a desperately needed refurbishment of their playpark. When might they expect this help from the Scottish Government and how much?

Answer

No information received from Scottish Government on this as yet.

However, I am aware that Cosla's Settlement and Distribution Group will be meeting this week to consider a range of funding for local government including commitments following Scottish Governments 1st Steps 100-day plan. An additional £60m has been promised for funding for playparks in local communities across Scotland and I expect Fife to get its fair share of that funding. I also am aware that there is significant funding available for playparks through grants from Fife Environmental Trust. £10k to £50k as I have supported local groups in my own ward of Burntisland Kinghorn, West Kirkcaldy and Auchtertool to access that funding. Support is also available from Fife Councils Playparks officers to help local groups plan or improve their existing play facilities. I also know that your local community manager should be able to give your local group access to the regular community funding update which helps many local organisations access funds for local projects. I am sure the Volunteers in St Monans will be successful in their endeavours with your support Cllr Holt.

QUESTION 19 FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA HOLT

The SNP were re-elected last month on a manifesto promise of a free laptop or device for every pupil, together with a free internet connection. Everyone recognises that the education of poorer pupils who lacked suitable devices and an internet connection suffered disproportionately during lockdown, this promise should be delivered with the utmost urgency. Has Fife Council been told when the Scottish Government intends to make good on its promise? What contact has been made from the Scottish Government with Fife Council to organise the implementation of this policy?

Answer

There has not been any contact as yet with the local authority from the Scottish Government on the implementation of this national policy.

However, from Scottish Government Education Recovery grant funding already received, over 8500 chromebook devices have already been distributed to those children and young people identified as having no or limited access to a device. A further 3500 chromebook devices will be distributed following delivery of these devices over the summer period. All children or young people identified as requiring connectivity solutions to support the use of these devices have been issued with a unlimited data device.

QUESTION 20 FROM COUNCILLOR LINDA HOLT

The SNP were re-elected last month on a manifesto promise of free bikes for all school-age children who cannot afford them. Given I have constituents who are worrying whether they can afford a bike for their children's birthdays and Christmases, when might they expect the Government to make good on its promise? Has the Scottish Government made any contact with Fife Council about implementing this promise?

Answer

No information received as yet however the Scottish Government are well ahead and plans will be forthcoming for this scheme in the coming months.