

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 2 APRIL 2015 at 11.15 AM.

COUNCILLORS:

Allyson Black
Baillie William Buchanan
Charles MacDonald
Baillie Joan Paterson
Provost Pat Reid (Convener)

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Bryan Smail, Chief Finance Officer

ALSO ATTENDING:

Neil Brown, General Manager, Falkirk Community Trust
Jane Clark, Business Development Manager, Falkirk Community Trust

S1. APOLOGIES

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor McLuckie.

S2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Provost Reid and Baillie Buchanan declared a non-financial interest in S4 as directors of Falkirk Community Trust but did not consider that this required them to recuse themselves from consideration of the item, having regard to the objective test in the Code of Conduct and the relevant specific exclusion contained in the code.

S3. MINUTES

- (a) The minute of the meeting of the Performance Panel held on 5 February 2015 was noted, and
- (b) The minute of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 19 February 2015 was approved.

Baillie Paterson entered the meeting during consideration of the following item of business.

S4. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND: FALKIRK COMMUNITY TRUST

The committee considered a report by the Chief Executive presenting an update on the performance of Falkirk Community Trust (the Trust) against key objectives for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 December 2014, in line with Following the Public Pound and Council procedures.

The report provided information on the Trust's objectives and performance, key achievements and financial performance. Neil Brown, General Manager, Falkirk Community Trust gave an overview of the report.

The committee highlighted the Trust's success in securing the Commonwealth Games running track for Grangemouth Stadium and asked for further information on funding opportunities arising from that. Neil Brown stated that an application had been made for a grant of £500,000 from sportscotland. Meetings had been held with sportscotland prior to securing the replacement track for Grangemouth Stadium. The work to get the track had convinced sportscotland that the Trust was committed to the future of the facility. If funding was awarded by sportscotland it would be used to refurbish the indoor running track, reception and changing rooms.

Members asked about the opportunities for income generation at Callendar House, particularly around Christmas events. Neil Brown stated that due to the layout of the site it was challenging to create a traditional visitor pathway ending in the gift shop. The gift shop had been refreshed and a review carried out of staffing and the layout. The number of products had been reduced and the products stocked were carefully selected by doing so the circulation space for visitors had been increased. He stated that while the portacabin site for souvenir sales at Helix Park had been well used as a temporary solution, it would not be suitable to use at Callendar House as it would detract from the site's aesthetic. He stated that the Trust was aware of the need to improve the tea room at Callendar House and that work was ongoing.

The committee stated that income generation at Helix Park could be improved and asked what plans were in place. Neil Brown stated that the park had been designed to be free for all and that visitor numbers had nearly doubled predictions. The Trust had inherited the site and was adapting its approach in order to maximise income. The visitor centre would open in October 2015. The Trust had run coaching sessions for children but these had not been well enough attended to sustain. There had been demand for pedalos, kayaks and canoes at the lagoon which had been procured and were available. He advised that the cost of a tour of the Kelpies had increased from £4.95 to £6.95. A familiarisation event had been held with coach tour companies to encourage them to stop at the Kelpies. The Trust had engaged nine franchisees who offered varied catering throughout the park. He stated that car park charges at the visitors centre had been introduced from 1 April 2015.

Members stressed the importance of making the most of the opportunity for income generation at Helix Park and asked if any events were planned. Neil Brown stated that no major events would be held until the appropriate infrastructure was in place. The retail product range had been developed and was, in his opinion, the best range since opening. He highlighted the opportunity to have live music and kids' clubs on site to attract footfall. Jane Clark stated that there would be events in 2016 around the year of innovation, architecture and design. Neil Brown advised that the emergency services event which had been held in 2014 was a success and would be held again in 2015. Neil Brown stated that

Visit Falkirk had worked with a local bus operator to brand and market a route between five key tourist sites including the Falkirk Wheel and Helix Park.

In response to a question on the new software invested in for libraries, Neil Brown stated that a better service was now available for customers and that the new system had been necessary as the old one was not fit for purpose.

Members asked for an update on the gym facility at Stenhousemuir. Neil Brown stated that following a procurement process the contract had been awarded and that the facility was on target to open around late August 2015.

The committee stated that they had hoped to see a more balanced winter programme at the Hippodrome to meet both populist and avant-garde tastes. Neil Brown stated that the committee's comments had been taken on board and were reflected in the most recent programme for the Hippodrome.

Members asked for information on the marketing resources of the Trust. Neil Brown stated that the Trust had a marketing team of six people which included one officer who was solely dedicated to marketing Helix Park. There had been an impact on the operation of the team due to long term sickness absence but the team had reprioritised its focus to ensure that key areas were delivered effectively.

The committee asked how performance measures and targets were set. Neil Brown advised that targets were set by team leaders and staff and then reviewed by the senior management team before submission to the Trust's board as part of the business plan. Jane Clark advised that the performance indicators were developed from statutory reportable indicators. Neil Brown stated that the Trust was a member of Sporta – the national association of leisure and cultural trusts. Most trusts were only responsible for sport and leisure so direct benchmarking and comparisons were not made but informal evaluation and best practice sharing occurred.

In response to discussion about following the public pound and ensuring best value, Neil Brown referred to the performance trends since the establishment of the Trust. He stated that the amount of income generated had increased by 22% for the period of the Trust's operation and that the annual report showed real progress in participation, improvements to assets and finances.

Members asked about the Festival of Silent Cinema and income generated. Neil Brown advised that the financial outcome of the event was currently unknown as it had only concluded on 22 March 2015.

The committee asked for an update on work to the flumes at Grangemouth swimming pool. Neil Brown stated that the refurbished flumes would be operational before the school summer holidays at the end of June.

In response to a question on how the Trust got feedback from customers, Neil Brown stated that a survey had been carried out with customers two years ago and would be carried out again in 2016.

Members sought further information on the availability of family swim tickets at the Mariner Centre. Neil Brown advised that family tickets were available for all of the Trust's swimming pools and that there was also discount available to customers who purchased monthly passes.

The committee asked if issues arising from the introduction of charges to school lets had been resolved. Neil Brown advised that following discussions organisations who had been resistant to the changes had accepted the reasoning for the policy and that it resulted in the better utilisation of assets. He confirmed that where voluntary organisations booked multiple areas they were only charged for the use of one part of the facility.

Members raised concern about the heating system in Falkirk Town Hall. Neil Brown stated that significant investment was required in the heating system to address the issue.

The committee asked if the Trust was looking at ways to increase the usage of the Hippodrome for corporate events. Neil Brown stated that a report had been considered by the board's sub-group and that reduced charges had been agreed. He stated that there were a number of issues including; lack of daytime demand, no backstage facility and little circulation space.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress Falkirk Community Trust has made in delivering on its core commitments for the Council.