

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (EXTERNAL) held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2015 at 9.30 a.m.

COUNCILLORS:

David Balfour
Gordon Hughes
Steven Jackson (Convener)
Charles MacDonald
Brian McCabe
John McLuckie
Rosie Murray
Depute Provost John Patrick

OFFICERS:

Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy & ICT Improvement
Matthew Davies, Service Manager – Children & Families
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Nikki Harvey, Service Manager – Community Care
Iain Henderson, Legal Services Manager
Liz McGhee, Service Manager – Community Care
Colin Moodie, Depute Chief Governance Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Susan Nixon, Service Manager – Community Care
Margaret Petherbridge, Project Development Manager

ALSO ATTENDING:

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

SE13. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

SE14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

SE15. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 17 September 2015 was approved.

SE16. ORDER OF BUSINESS

In terms of Standing Order 25.1(iii), the committee agreed to vary the order of business from that detailed on the agenda for the meeting. The following items have been recorded in the order that they were taken at the meeting.

SE17. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND: SERVICES TO CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE (FPP) – 2014/2015 MONITORING REPORT

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding to provide services to children and young people and who fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements. Robert Naylor provided an overview of the report.

Members asked for information on the funding provided to supporting children with additional support needs. Robert Naylor stated that this was a difficult figure to quantify and included the provision of learning assistants and peripatetic teachers. Funding was provided to each school and members were advised that information on the amount of funding allocated centrally would be provided after the meeting.

The committee sought information on the average waiting time for an appointment with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Robert Naylor advised that he would get the information and provide it to members after the meeting. He stated that there was a significant challenge in this area nationally.

The committee asked how often monitoring officers met with officers from CAMHS. Robert Naylor advised that in general monitoring officers for organisations monitored through the FPP regime would meet with officers of an organisation on a three, six or nine monthly basis depending on the level of risk associated with the organisation. Fiona Campbell advised that monitoring officers were given guidance on how to assess risk and assign the most appropriate rating. Matthew Davies advised that monitoring officers were also in direct contact with organisations outwith their regular monitoring meetings.

Members sought further information on the process of evaluating the progress of an organisation. Matthew Davies stated that an outcome focussed approach was taken and that monitoring officers ensured that progress was being made against individual outcomes. He advised that third sector organisations were often already outcome focussed as they needed to be able to demonstrate the impact of their work to funders.

The committee asked why some of the organisations had been rated as carrying medium risk. Matthew Davies stated that the medium risk rating had been assigned due to the threat of funding reductions which would put pressure on service delivery. He advised that there were no specific concerns in relation to any of the organisations covered in the report. If funding was reduced then the Service would need to review what the organisations could deliver for that level of funding.

Members asked what impact universal credit was likely to have on the use of foodbanks. Robert Naylor stated that there was a possibility that the use of foodbanks

would increase. He advised that the report provided statistics on the use of foodbanks nationally and that work was required to drill down and identify the situation locally. He highlighted the challenging circumstances that many families were in.

A question was asked in relation to the proportion of children looked after away from home who were cared for outwith Falkirk Council resources. Matthew Davies stated that there were 80 children being looked after by external service providers and that in addition to those looked after away from home there were approximately 150 children looked after at home.

In response to a question on preparedness for an increase to the school age population, Robert Naylor stated that the Service had planned well in advance for the population increase and had planned for school roll changes through a programme of upgrading the school estate. He highlighted that there was a complex picture in Falkirk as the population was increasing in some areas while declining in others.

The committee asked for information on the work carried out with schools regarding employability. Robert Naylor stated that for children who were under pressure to leave education due to financial pressures at home external organisations provided services to give support and allow continued access to education. There was a well developed programme of work carried out by schools in relation to employability and the success of the SCOTS programme with Forth Valley College was highlighted. The school curriculum had been adapted to meet the needs of every young person and provided access to vocational qualifications. He advised that the number of positive destinations achieved was increasing.

Members asked if the organisations in receipt of funding mainly worked in areas of deprivation or if they were available across the district. Matthew Davies stated that the referral mechanisms allowed any child or young person to access services. Fiona Campbell stated that the Community Planning Partnership was focussed on the impact of poverty on children.

Decision

The committee approved the reports for:

- i) Barnardo's Axis Service;
- ii) Barnardo's Cluaran Service;
- iii) NHS Forth Valley CAMHS Clinical Psychologist for Looked after Children;
- iv) Quarriers Scotland Falkirk Children's Rights Service;
- v) Signpost Recovery Time 4 Us, and
- vi) "Who Cares?" Scotland Children's Rights Service

and acknowledged progress by the organisations in meeting Council priorities.

SE18. 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 March 2015, in line with Following the Public Pound (FPP) and Council procedures.

The report provided information on the Trust's objectives and service outcomes, performance and a financial overview. Appended to the report were performance reports for: April 2014 to March 2015; July to August 2015, and April to September 2015. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report and Neil Brown provided an update on the key achievements and challenges relating to the Trust.

Members discussed admissions across the Trust's venues and asked for information on work to utilise community schools more fully and in particular Graeme High School. Neil Brown stated that Graeme High School was a Class 98 school and that this created an issue for the Trust as there could be short notice cancellations to hires. The Trust was in discussion with Class 98 to resolve the situation. He advised that charging had been introduced for the first time last year at community schools as the part of the Trust's strategy to increase income generation. Affected groups who had used the facilities prior to charging were met with and kept informed during the process. He stated that further work promoting the schools would be carried out and that the Trust was working closely with Children's Services.

In response to a question on admission to the Mariner Centre, Neil Brown stated that performance was impacted by work to improve the wave machine in the swimming pool and that since the upgrade works admissions had improved significantly. Work was also planned to upgrade the flumes at Grangemouth swimming pool.

Following a question on efficiencies and cost savings, Neil Brown stated that the Trust's savings plans would be included in the business plan to be submitted to Council. He highlighted the scale of growth achieved by the Trust over the previous four years since its inception and advised that the senior management team has been reduced in size.

The committee discussed charges at sports halls and community schools as well as their potential impact on voluntary groups. Neil Brown stated that the introduction of new charges had been unpopular initially but for that the facilities were cleaned, heated and staffed. The charge of £10 a session was seen to represent good value and he commented that most organisations had attendance in the region of 20 to 30 people.

Members highlighted the appearance of Grangemouth Sports Complex commenting that it looked tired and dated. Neil Brown stated that the condition of assets was a concern for the Trust. Work had been carried out at the Grangemouth Sports Complex to make improvements including relaying the floor, renovating the lighting, upgrading the gym equipment and decorating the crèche.

The committee asked for information on the car parking available at the Helix site and provision for disabled people. Neil Brown advised that additional car parking was available for the Helix site at Falkirk stadium but that during the period of refurbishment over the summer it had been unavailable to the public. The Trust had

liaised with Police Scotland to develop a road strategy which was now in place. There were 7 disabled car parking spaces available at the visitor centre which was staffed by attendants to ensure they were used correctly. There were no plans to create additional parking for disabled people. The committee requested information on how the Trust was ensuring compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Neil Brown advised he would provide this after the meeting. Following a question about the possibility of providing wheelchairs or scooters for hire similar to shop mobility, Neil Brown stated that it would be looked at for next summer.

The committee asked if there were arrangements in place for tours of the Kelpies for people with visual impairments. Neil Brown stated that there was nothing specific in place but that the tours were run with a degree of flexibility and highlighted that ghost tours had been put on at Halloween.

In response to a question on proposals for a miniature road train at the Helix site, Neil Brown advised that Police Scotland had given indication that it would not be appropriate as the route would take in parts of the public path network. He advised that Police Scotland had advised that if there was to be any sort of collision involving the land train that it would need to be treated as a road traffic accident.

Members commented on the success of the replacement track at Grangemouth stadium and asked if there were plans to upgrade the track inside the stadium. Neil Brown stated that £350,000 of funding had been received from sportscotland to replace the indoor track, this would make it the same standard as the Commonwealth Games track already in place and work would be carried out by September 2016.

The committee discussed the provision of swimming pools locally. Neil Brown stated that the Trust would work to promote the pool facilities available at community schools.

Members sought information on how the Trust engaged with the Council and elected members. Neil Brown stated that there were five elected members on the Trust's Board which comprised of 11 members in total. Further, the Trust met regularly with officers of the Council and there were 10 service level agreements in place. The Trust held quarterly meetings with the Council's Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer as well as giving briefing sessions to elected members.

The committee discussed the promotion of gym fees by the Trust. Neil Brown stated that the commercial sector sometimes took the approach of advertising their lowest charges most strongly whereas the Trust promoted its peak costs in order to be upfront with the public. He stated that the prices charged by the Trust were comparable to the commercial sector but that promotion was carried out with a different focus.

Members asked how the Trust would make better use of the smaller sports halls. Neil Brown stated that, for instance, the facility at Stenhousemuir had been used as extra capacity for Larbert High School during the day as the Trust had identified spare capacity at the facility. He stated that the Hallglen facility was reasonably busy at night but not well used during the day. He advised that the heating system at Hallglen needed work. He commented that each neighbourhood centre had specific needs and demands.

The committee discussed the number of participants in health lifestyle physical activity programmes. Neil Brown provided an overview of many of the activities included within this area including buggy walks, Nordic skiing, Active Forth and Step Forth. There had been a staffing issue which affected the number of GP referrals received but the issue was resolved and the situation improved.

Members asked if any market research had been carried out in relation to Falkirk or Grangemouth Town Halls. Neil Brown stated that there had not been any research carried out at the two sites referred to but that the Trust had undertaken a customer survey two years previously. He advised that the Trust received lots of customer feedback including comments through its website.

The committee asked for further information on Park Gallery. Neil Brown stated that the Trust chose the exhibitions at Park Gallery carefully. He highlighted that in 2014/15 there had been two contemporary art exhibitions which, while well received by the arts sector, had not appealed very widely with the public. Attendance figures had been increasing at the gallery.

Members asked how attendances levels were monitored across the Trust's venues. Neil Brown stated that the method used depended upon the site. At Stenhousemuir neighbourhood facility information was collated manually from the booking sheet while there was a clicker counter at Callendar House. Although there may be an element of inaccuracy in the figures, there had been consistency in collection methods at each site over time meaning that comparisons over time could usefully be made.

The committee asked for further information on income levels. Neil Brown stated that at the close of 2014/15 the Trust's trading company had passed a surplus to the charitable company for the first time. At the inception of the Trust there was an approximate £250k deficit whereas the trading company now operated around breakeven. He stated that through creation of the Trust around £1million per annum had been saved in rates alone.

Members commented on opening times of libraries and highlighted that the 3pm closure time on a Saturday was not convenient for most people and that a later time would benefit communities. Neil Brown stated that opening hours were extensively researched and evaluated. He advised that every hour extra that libraries were open would carry additional staffing costs.

Members discussed the format of reports from the Trust and the performance information presented. Neil Brown stated that the style was the same as that used for the Trust's Board. The committee agreed that, in future, it would not wish targets to be presented with a 5% tolerance as explained at paragraph 3.1 of the covering report.

Decision

The committee approved the report, acknowledged the progress Falkirk Community Trust has made in delivering on its core commitments for the Council and agreed that for future reports it would wish that performance targets not be reported with a 5% tolerance.

The committee agreed to a short adjournment at 11.50 and reconvened at 11.55 with all members present as per the sederunt with the exception of Councillor MacDonald.

SE19. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND (FPP) – HEALTH AND OLDER PEOPLE

The committee considered a report by the Head of Social Work Adult Services which provided an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding to provide services relating to health for older people and who fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements. Colin Moodie provided an overview of the report.

The committee then heard from officers in relation to the individual reports.

(a) Independent Living Association Forth Valley – Forth Valley Self Directed Support Service

Members asked about the risk of the two other local authorities which provided funding to the organisation withdrawing their contribution. Margaret Petherbridge stated that the level of service provided could be affected if there was reduction in funding from the other authorities and that the organisation was looking at alternative funding streams to build security in the organisation.

The committee commented that the report did not highlight the respective contribution of each council. Margaret Petherbridge advised that the other councils provided slightly more direct funding but that Falkirk Council gives a significant contribution of in-kind support.

Members sought further information on the work of the organisation. Margaret Petherbridge stated that as well as offering expert advice in relation to self directed support community cafes were run once a month with the development officer and that there were different speakers invited. She advised that the organisation also worked closely with a variety of other organisations and partners.

The committee asked about the funding contribution from the Scottish Government. Margaret Petherbridge advised that in year one £171,000 had been received, £304,000 in year two and £171,000 in year three. £103,000 had been allocated for the current financial year with the level for next year unknown until after the spending review. She stated that there was enough money in the organisation's reserves to continue to provide services for two to three months.

Members discussed the recruitment of volunteers. Margaret Petherbridge stated that the recruitment of volunteers had been a challenge as the organisation finalised its vision for what was expected from volunteers. There had been an additional challenge around securing sufficient finance to ensure expenses could be paid. There were peer support groups in place nationally which had also been difficult to set up.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Independent Living Association Forth Valley – Forth Valley Self Directed Support Service in meeting Council priorities.

(b) Central Carers Association - Falkirk Carers Centre

The committee discussed the contribution of informal carers in Scotland and highlighted the work carried out by young carers in particular. Members commented that the average age of a young carer in Scotland was 12 years old. Nikki Harvey stated that the youngest carer the Council was aware of was 8 years old, she further advised that 47% of informal carers provided over 35 hours per week of care.

Members asked what level of demand the service experienced year on year. Nikki Harvey stated that she would get the information and provide to members after the meeting. In response to a question from the committee, Nikki Harvey confirmed that the organisation did receive funding from NHS Forth Valley.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Central Carers Association – Falkirk Carers Centre in meeting Council priorities.

Depute Provost Patrick left the meeting during consideration of the previous item.

(c) RVS – Meals on Wheels

Members asked what training was available to volunteers. Liz McGhee stated that the service level agreement stated that all volunteers required to be trained and PVG checked. Training was carried out by social work services, the Carers Centre and some by RVS itself.

The committee asked if the service could be expanded to cover the entire district. Liz McGhee advised that the Service was engaging with the organisation on the issues in specific areas where the meals on wheels service was not available. She also advised that meals on wheels was not appropriate for everyone and highlighted the impact of private competitors and microwave ready meals. Work was being carried out to improve the promotion of the service.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by RVS – Meals on Wheels in meeting Council priorities.

In terms of Standing Order 25.1(x), the committee agreed that the time for the meeting be extended.

(d) Alzheimer Scotland – Alzheimer's Scotland Day Care Provision

The committee discussed the level of information provided in the report and asked for more detail on how many staff were involved with the organisation and what services were provided. Susan Nixon stated that she would provide the information after the meeting.

Decision

The committee requested further information on Alzheimer Scotland – Alzheimer's Scotland Day Care Provision on the services provided locally and the number of staff involved.

(e) Falkirk & District Association for Mental Health

The committee discussed waiting times for the service and increased pressure through increased demand. Nikki Harvey stated that the service aimed to see people within two to four weeks of their referral.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Falkirk & District Association for Mental Health in meeting Council priorities.