

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.