




SE14. Following the Public Pound: Falkirk Community Trust

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update of the performance of Falkirk Community Trust (the Trust) during the financial year 2019/20 as part of the Following the Public Pound arrangements.

The Council had provided £10.9m support to the Trust to provide culture, recreation, sports and library services on its behalf.

The Trust's performance against targets during the period was as follows:-

Reporting Period	On or above target performance 		0% to 10% below target performance 		10% or more below target performance 	
	No. of indicators	% of total	No. of indicators	% of total	No. of indicators	% of total
April 2019 to March 2020 (indicators)	11	34%	10	31%	11	34%

The report set out:-

- The Trust's key year end performance highlights against target
- Areas of performance which had not met target
- Highlights during 2019/20.

The following were also provided as appendices to the report:-

- FCT Annual Report 2019/20
- Financial Reports and Statements for 2019/20
- Report to FCT on performance for 2019/20
- Report to FCT on performance for the period July to September 2020.

The committee noted the overall positive trend in performance and acknowledged the impact on performance towards the end of the reporting period when the impacts of Covid-19 were being felt, and asked for more detail, in particular of the remedies the Trust had to improve performance. It was also suggested that additional comparison data would have been beneficial to members. Mr Brown stated firstly that the Trust was open and transparent in regard to performance information it published. It was appropriate that the Board itself received more detail in regard to performance. He noted that context was important. For example, he cited the performance of the Mariner Centre. Usage was down compared to the previous year. However, it was important to note, however, that the centre had been closed for £1.2m refurbishment during the period, and the upper level had been closed for some time. Similarly, the usage figures for Kinneil Museum had not included visits as part of trips organised by Friends of Kinneil which had not started at the Museum but had included a visit there. In regard to Bo'ness recreation Centre, Mr Brown noted that performance had been impacted by plant issues and also by a negative perception in the

community that it had been slated for closure where in fact there had been significant investment in the centre over recent years. The committee thanked Mr Brown for his detailed response which reinforced its view that the contextual information would have been useful.

Following a question Mr Brown confirmed that the Trust had not opened its facilities on 5 July when the Scottish Government had indicated that facilities could re-open after lockdown. There were a number of factors to this Mr Brown explained. Guidance had been issued almost daily and while the Trust had been preparing to open its facilities on that date the Council had asked it not to do so until its officers had carried out detailed Risk Assessments on the facilities and this had led to a delay in meeting some opening targets. Mr Brown indicated that while he understood the Council's position, he was also sensitive to customers' expectations at the time around the re-opening of facilities. At the time there had also been training needs for staff and in some cases, this took the opening date 3 weeks beyond the 'go' date permitted by the Scottish Government. Nonetheless members of the committee commended the Trust on its speed in resuming services.

Mr Brown explained that the reason for the outstanding pension contributions of £0.19m by Trust employees was due to the timing of the accounts process and this had not been flagged by the Auditor's as an issue in the final Accounts.

The committee noted that customer income had increased by 5% compared to the previous year and that external income of £810k had been secured through grants and fundraising. The committee asked for detail on the income raised and also asked what the Trust was doing to increase the level of external funding received. Mr Brown responded that the grants awarded varied in size (for example £4500 had been awarded by the McRoberts Trust, £2500 from Falkirk Environment Trust, £1174 from Green Scotland together with funding from the Scottish Government for Helix events and the Scottish Book Trust for events. He undertook to provide the committee with a full list. Mr Brown stated that the Trust would apply for whatever funding was available to it in a given year. In response to a further question Mr Brown confirmed that the Trust would look to secure available funding for Mental Health awareness and training. A number of staff had already been trained in mental health awareness and the Trust had a good relationship with the NHS in this regard and cited the Step Forth walking programme and the advice offered within gyms as examples of its focus on health and wellbeing.

In regard to Grangemouth Golf Course the committee noted a drop in rounds played (92% fewer in q4 of 2019/20 compared to 2018/19) and asked if this was due in part to the condition of the course. Mr Brown stated that this was due to Covid-19. He added that maintenance of the course was the responsibility of the Trust. The Trust had been in discussion for 3 years with the Club for the transfer of the course to the club. Income had continued to increase and the number of rounds played had increased year on year. In 2019/20 there had been a downpour which had affected the course and he conceded that the Trust did not have the funding available to

fully maintain the course – nevertheless he noted that Bunkered magazine had acknowledged the course as one of the best public courses in Scotland.

Following a question on the performance of the Mariner Centre, as set out in the bar chart provided in the report Mr Brown repeated that while this looked like a ‘fail’ it needed to be recognised that the centre had undergone a £1.2m refurbishment during the period and had reopened in January. It had then been victim to the pandemic, so it was difficult to assess the impact of the refurbishment on attendance. He anticipated that the investment would be a success although it may take a couple of years to recover.

Customer income had increased by 5.5% to £8.211m – following a question on the contributing factors to this increase, Mr Brown stated that there had been a 14% increase in income from Health and Fitness activities and investment had shown the Trust’s desire to be cutting edge in this area.

The committee noted the move to online ticketing for Falkirk Town Hall, the Hippodrome and various major external events and asked whether the transition had been successful. Mr Brown said that it had. The Trust had withdrawn the ticket service from the Steeple and had invested in online technology such as for ticketing and its online profile. This had been a major benefit during the pandemic. As an example, he said that the Trust had attracted Santa Mrs Claus to Calendar House, and this had been promoted on Facebook. The site had received 3m ‘points of interest’ from across the world - the ‘reach’ was pleasing from both a tourism and business point of view.

Decision

The Committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the Trust in meeting Council priorities.