

S58. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND REPORT: FALKIRK ENVIRONMENT TRUST/FALKIRK TOWNS LTD

The committee considered a report by the by the Director of Development Services which provided an update on the work of Falkirk Environment Trust (FET) and Falkirk Towns Ltd as external organisations in receipt of funding which fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements.

The report provided an overview of each organisation and an assessment of their performance. The committee heard from officers in relation to the individual reports.

(a) Falkirk Environment Trust

John Angell provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £27,450 of Council funding. FET was established in 1998 as a charitable company to disburse monies available from the Landfill Communities Fund to local agencies and community groups engaged in appropriate, qualifying environmental improvement works.

The committee asked if there was a way to increase the number of independent community organisations benefiting from FET. Alan Rodger stated that many projects already came forward from communities and community councils. It was also the case that FET or a development manager would work with communities after they had identified projects to look at ways to draw on as much external funding as possible. Alan Rodger also highlighted the promotion strategy used by FET.

Members asked if the amount of money available to FET from landfills would reduce. Alan Rodger stated that for the next 2 to 5 years funding was secure but that there would be an impact in the longer term of the Scottish Government Zero Waste Plan.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Falkirk Environment Trust in meeting Council priorities.

Councillor McLuckie re-entered the meeting following the conclusion of the previous item of business.

In accordance with her declaration of interest, Councillor Black left the meeting at this point.

(b) Falkirk Towns Ltd – Management of Town Centres

John Angell and Alastair Mitchell, Bid Manager provided an overview of the report, advising that the organisation received £188,309 of Council funding. Falkirk Towns Ltd contributed to the economic performance of town centres in the Falkirk area.

The committee asked what work was ongoing to encourage occupation in vacant properties. Alastair Mitchell stated highlighted a case of a pharmacy which had been given a small grant and exemplified that the local independent sector was doing well.

Members asked about the level of business rates. Alastair Mitchell stated that there were a number of campaigns going on in this area to lobby for revaluation. The Association

of Town Centre Management researchers were looking at the impact on town centres of the current business rates.

The committee asked if a quantifiable benefit was achieved from the performance of the Red Hot Chilli Pipers at the Steeple 200 years celebrations. Alastair Mitchell stated that there had been a 19% increase in town centre footfall on the day and that traders reported it to have been their best day of trading. Alastair Mitchell also highlighted that work in the town centre had resulted in winning the Association of Town Centre Management developing the evening and night time economy award and coming runner up for BID of the year.

Members asked what work had been done to support Denny town centre. Alastair Mitchell highlighted a number of events which had taken place in the town centre, which had been well supported by the local community.

The committee asked about the presence of charity collectors and beggars in the town centre. Alastair Mitchell stated that a license was required to carry out charity collection in the town centre but that this did not apply to the Howgate shopping centre as it was private property. It was policy to have only one authorised charity collection per day. Colin Moodie advised that begging was not a criminal activity unless causing distress to the public but that Police Scotland had stated they were monitoring the situation closely.

Members asked about the future challenges of maintaining high street occupancy and what type of retail offer would be available for customers. Alastair Mitchell advised that it was unlikely that 100% occupancy through retail could be achieved in the town centre due to the changes in how people shop. However, occupancy could be improved through allowing offices in the town centre and that where young entrepreneurs wanted to try retail in the town centre Business Gateway would provide support.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged the progress made by Falkirk Towns Ltd in meeting Council priorities.