

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest includes a crown with four maple leaves, a shield divided into four quadrants (top-left: a diagonal bar with a cross; top-right: a stag's head; bottom-left: a sailing ship; bottom-right: an eagle with spread wings), and a banner at the bottom with the motto 'A NE FOR A'.

AGENDA ITEM

3

MINUTE

DRAFT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (EXTERNAL) held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 10 MARCH 2016 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:

Richard Broadley, Planning & Environment Manager
Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology & Improvement
Elaine Costello, Integration Support Manager
Jack Frawley, Committee Services Officer
Rhona Geisler, Director of Development Services
Iain Henderson, Legal Services Manager
Pete Reid, Growth & Investment Manager
Joanna Stewart, Senior Development Officer

ALSO ATTENDING:

Gary Laing, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Martin Riach, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Eddie Ritchie, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

SE25. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

SE26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SE27. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 7 January 2016 was approved.

Councillor Hughes entered the meeting prior to consideration of the following item.

SE28. SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – FALKIRK & WEST LOTHIAN COMMAND PERFORMANCE REPORT

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services presenting reports by the Local Senior Officer on: Falkirk performance for 1 April 2014 to 31 December 2015; contextual appendices containing supplementary information, and a report on Bonfire/Firework Activity for 2015. Gary Laing, Martin Riach and Eddie Ritchie (all Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS)) provided an overview of the attached performance reports.

The committee asked for information relating to fire incidents at schools. Gary Laing advised that the incidents had been of an anti-social nature and the Service had engaged directly with children in the schools.

Members asked if there was a reason for the 16% increase in deliberate fire setting. Gary Laing stated that there was no specific reason but that trend analysis had been carried out which had resulted in a more targeted approach in specific areas.

Following a question from members, Martin Riach confirmed that the comparator authority used in the figures was West Lothian.

The committee discussed the Safe Drive Stay Alive campaign and asked if this work had reduced the number of road traffic accidents involving young people. Gary Laing stated that it was difficult to make a direct correlation and highlighted that the Fire Service's approach was of education not enforcement.

Members asked why the number of false alarms varied quite significantly in different areas across the district. Gary Laing advised that each area had specific circumstances which needed to be accounted for, such as the hospital being situated in Larbert. The Service was being proactive and was carrying out engagement with owners of premises with high rates of false alarms. Martin Riach advised that more industrial areas tended to have higher incidents of false alarms.

The committee discussed derelict properties and associated fire risk.

Members asked about abuse toward Scottish Fire and Rescue Service staff on Bonfire night. Gary Laing stated that there had been a good response from Police Scotland where incidents occurred and that information had been exchanged between the two organisations as part of the preparation for the night.

Decision

The committee noted the performance report and supporting information.

SE29. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND (FPP): MARGINALISED GROUPS

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services providing an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding to provide services with a focus on marginalised groups and who fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements. In addition the report

provided an update regarding the live commissioning process for services for survivors of trauma. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report.

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

(a) The Action Group – Real Jobs Falkirk

Elaine Costello provided an overview of the report, advising that The Action Group – Real Jobs Falkirk received a direct grant of £90,000 in the period.

Members asked if the opportunity of accessing funds through the Integration Joint Board (IJB) or other funders had been explored. Elaine Costello advised that the IJB route had not yet been examined and that the focus of the work had been on the children's part to date. Projects relating to employability could be explored with the IJB.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by The Action Group – Real Jobs Falkirk in meeting Council priorities.

(b) Salvation Army – Soup Kitchen

Joanna Stewart provided an overview of the report, advising that the Salvation Army – Soup Kitchen had received £10,745 of Council funding in the reporting period.

In relation to a question on the role of volunteers with the soup kitchen, Joanna Stewart advised that they were involved with the day to day running of the service including preparing food and providing company. The number of volunteers present varied.

Members asked how people were engaged beyond the physical confines of the soup kitchen. Joanna Stewart stated that the soup kitchen co-ordinator carries out work on the streets and visits other communities. Further, a minivan was utilised to take people to the soup kitchen when needed.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by the Salvation Army – Soup Kitchen in meeting Council priorities.

(c) Central Scotland Regional Equality Council (CSREC)

Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report, advising that CSREC received £10,200 of Council funding and £10,000 of in-kind support in the reporting period.

Members asked about the widened remit of the organisation. Fiona Campbell stated that the organisation was formerly the Racial Council and had expanded its objectives to include all the protected characteristics. However, she noted that other organisations cover some of the other protected characteristics.

The committee asked how long CSREC had been reported as a high risk organisation. Fiona Campbell advised that CSREC had been rated as high risk for the past two years.

This was due to challenges with the board, governance and financial issues, however there had been improvements made which needed to be sustained.

Members discussed governance and board skill sets. Fiona Campbell stated that the board membership had been refreshed and that a new Chair was in place. There were regular meetings between the monitoring officer, Chair and staff. There had been increased support along with better scrutiny and challenge. It was noted that although the organisation has a treasurer they need professional advice beyond that, particularly pertaining to pension liability.

The committee asked about the funding for the organisation. Fiona Campbell stated that there was a complicated mix of funding in place between core funding and that for specific projects. Core funding was provided by the Council and Forth Valley Language Support which was supplemented by the accommodation provided. The organisation had been asked to present its accounts at a meeting to discuss finances. Members asked if the organisation received Scottish Government funding, Fiona Campbell advised this would need to be checked with the organisation.

Decision

The committee agreed to request a further report on Central Scotland Regional Equality Council to a future meeting providing an update on the key challenges facing the organisation.

(d) Falkirk and District Women's Aid – Domestic Abuse Support Services

Joanna Stewart provided an overview of the report, advising that Falkirk and District Women's Aid – Domestic Abuse Support Services received £244,170 of Council funding and £8,000 of in-kind support for the reporting period.

The committee commented that there was a significant amount of funding held in reserves by the organisation and queried if this represented best value for the public pound. Joanna Stewart stated that the reserves had been significantly reduced and that the information would be included in future reports.

Members asked about the organisation's governance arrangements. Joanna Stewart stated that there was a good mix of expertise on the board and that there was a separate board for financial matters. The monitoring officer was in close contact with the organisation, usually on a weekly basis.

The committee asked if the number of referrals the organisation received was increasing. Joanna Stewart stated that referrals were up year on year and that this could be due to increased awareness rather than increased incidents.

Members asked about the potential impact of the introduction of universal credit. Joanna Stewart advised that there had been increased joint working with Housing and that advice would be available for clients of the organisation.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Falkirk and District Women's Aid – Domestic Abuse Support Service in meeting Council priorities.

(e) LinkLiving - Smartliving

Joanna Stewart provided an overview of the report, advising that LinkLiving - Smartliving received £14,114 of Council funding for the reporting period.

The committee asked if alternative methods of service delivery had been considered in order to ensure continuity of service. Joanna Stewart stated that there were discussion with the group who had produced a video and created activities and games to engage young people. One example was that of a household budget setting exercise. A discussion could be held with the organisation regarding schools having access to their video resource.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by LinkLiving - Smartliving in meeting Council priorities.

SE30. FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC POUND REPORT: FALKIRK ENVIRONMENT TRUST / FALKIRK TOWNS LTD

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services providing an update on the work of external organisations in receipt of funding, in part, from Development Services and who fall within the Following the Public Pound (FPP) reporting and monitoring arrangements. Rhona Geisler provided an overview of the report.

Councillor McLuckie declared a non-financial interest in SE30 as a director of Falkirk Environment Trust during the reporting period and stated that he considered that this required him to recuse himself from consideration of the item having regard to the objective test in the Code of Conduct. In accordance with his declaration of interest Councillor McLuckie left the meeting at this point.

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

(a) Falkirk Environment Trust

Richard Broadley provided an overview of the report, advising that Falkirk Environment Trust received a direct grant of £27,450 in the period.

Members asked about future issues facing the organisation. Richard Broadley stated that the Service was happy with performance in the period reported. The board would consider the impact of the small reduction to their allocation as a result of reduced receipts from Landfill tax credits. He advised that the maximum grant had been reduced from £50,000 to £30,000.

The committee asked when the criteria used for granting funding was last reviewed. Richard Broadley stated that the grant eligibility was informed by the national categories and the organisation makes its recommendations in line with that.

Decision

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

Prior to consideration of the following item of business Councillor McLuckie re-joined the meeting.

(b) Town Centre Management

Pete Reid provided an overview of the report, advising that Town Centre Management had received £188,890 of Council funding in the reporting period.

Members commented on the number of people using out of town retail locations and the cost of car parking in the town centre. Pete Reid advised that it was a BiD priority action to promote the town centre and night time economy. New retailers had recently been brought into the centre and this should attract increased footfall. However, he stated that it was a difficult retail landscape with vacant units and the rise of online retail. Reference was made to the Free After Three car parking initiative and it was stated that business owners had felt this had been successful.

The committee asked how Falkirk compared to other similar town centres nationally. Pete Reid stated that Falkirk had been 15th in Scotland out of well over a hundred as rated in the KACI measure. He stated that comparable town centres were Stirling, Dunfermline, and Livingstone. Members requested further information on KACI performance.

Members discussed the role of social media in promoting the town centre, Pete Reid confirmed that the organisation used social media actively as a tool for promotion activities.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Town Centre Management in meeting Council priorities.