

The background of the slide features a large, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver's coat of arms. The crest is a shield divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant shows a sailing ship on wavy lines representing water. The top-right quadrant depicts a stag's head with large antlers. The bottom-left quadrant contains a beaver. The bottom-right quadrant shows a grizzly bear standing on its hind legs. Above the shield is a crown with four maple leaves. A banner at the bottom of the shield contains the motto "A NE FOR A".

Agenda Item 3

Minute

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held in the Municipal Buildings, Falkirk on Thursday 29 August 2019 at 9.30 a.m.

Councillors: David Aitchison
David Balfour
Allyson Black
Jim Blackwood (Convener)
David Grant
Lynn Munro
Depute Provost Ann Ritchie

Officers: Fiona Campbell, Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement
Douglas Duff, Head of Planning and Economic Development
Stuart Irwin, Graduate, Democratic Services
Frank McChord, Local Community Planning Officer
Robert Naylor, Director of Children's Services
Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager
Pete Reid, Manager (Growth and Investment)

SE10. Apologies

An apology was intimated on behalf of Councillor Coleman.

SE11. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

SE12. Minute

Decision

The minute of meeting of the Scrutiny Committee (External) held on 30 May 2019 was approved.

SE13. Rolling Action Log

A rolling action log detailing a decision not yet implemented following the previous meeting on 30 May 2019 was provided.

Decision

The committee noted the rolling action log.

SE14. Following the Public Pound: Community Development

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services presenting reporting statements for organisations funded under the Following the Public Pound (FPP) arrangements for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 for community development.

Funding was provided by Children's Services to 4 external organisations to provide services which could not readily be provided by the Council. As part of the Following the Public Pound arrangements, reporting statements were prepared by the relevant monitoring officer for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee (External).

The four organisations were:-

Organisation	Monitoring Service	Annual Funding (£)
Dennyloanhead Community Hall Ltd	Children's Services	11,330
Denny Community Support Project	Children's Services	23,620
Workers Education Association	Children's Services	22,280
CVS Falkirk and District	Corporate and Neighbourhood Services	102,076

The Director of Children's Services highlighted the priorities set out by Council to work in partnership with communities to ensure it meets their needs. This included:-

- Working with communities to help them thrive by delivering services differently;
- Empowering and enabling people to be self-reliant; and
- Promoting stronger, more self reliant communities.

Following a question the Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement explained the Following the Public Pound reporting process.

The Committee noted that 2 of the 4 organisations were located in the Denny area, highlighting in particular the funding awarded to the Dennyloanhead Community Hall Ltd (£11,330). The committee praised the work of the Community Hall but sought assurance that funding generally and to Community Halls was provided on an equitable basis across the Council area. The committee also praised the work of the Community Learning and Development (CLD) Team. The Head of Policy, Technology and Improvement explained that the Council of the Future project included an

Enabled Communities strand. This included work already underway such as Locality Planning, Community Empowerment and Locality Action Plans. Work on this strand, which would include participatory budgeting would consider how the Council supports the community – through funding, direct support or capacity building and would look to ensure appropriate equitable support across the Council area. This could result in a reorganisation of resources to fit the delivery model rather than the current basis which included funding based on a historical basis.

Following a question the Director of Children's Services explained that reports by HMIE were not routinely submitted to the committee for consideration. It had been the practice that only those reports where the inspection found the service to be less than satisfactory would be reported. However the Education, Children and Young People Executive had recently agreed that any review of less than 'good' would be reported to the committee.

Members returned to the theme of funding noting that in the case each of the four organisations funding from the Council had been decreasing year on year. At some point, it was argued, some projects would be unsustainable. Members also noted that in previous years a budget saving proposal had been to cease funding CLD. Council had not accepted this option and the team continued to work with the community. Frank McChord pointed to ongoing work carried out by CLD to build capacity in the community. Following a question Mr McChord explained the current transition arrangements in place in regard to the management arrangements within the Dennyloanhead Community Hall Ltd, which were focussed on working with the neighbouring YMCA to create a campus model.

Decision

The committee approved the report and acknowledged progress by Community Development in meeting Council priorities.

SE15. Following the Public Pound – Falkirk Towns Ltd

The committee considered a report by the Director of Development Services presenting a reporting statement for Falkirk Towns Ltd as it had been funded under the Following the Public Pound (FPP) arrangements for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

Falkirk Towns Ltd had received funding of £78,308 to provide town centre management services and run the Falkirk Business Improvement District (BID) its work assisted the Council in achieving its economic development objectives and supported the Town Centre Partnership. A company limited by guarantee, Falkirk Towns Ltd was funded on the basis that it provided services which could not readily be provided by the Council or had not been provided in the past.

The activities of Falkirk Towns Ltd connected with services provided by Development Services to meet priorities and outcomes of the Council and its partners within the key SOLD plan outcomes of:

- Grow our economy
- Improving the neighbourhood we live in
- Promoting vibrant town centres

In supporting Falkirk Towns Ltd and its relationship with the Falkirk BID, the Council additionally helps to meet key corporate priorities of:

- Thinking differently about what our town centres can be
- Promoting town centres as places to live, socialise and participate
- Expanding our approach to safer streets

Falkirk Towns Ltd received £78,309 in 2018/19 to support this work.

The committee discussed the funding of Falkirk Towns Ltd noting that funding had decreased from £108,309 for the period April 2016 – March 2017.

Falkirk BID had generated income of £184,000 for town centre management through a BID business rates levy. It also had additional Council external funding support in respect of the Taxi Marshalling Service. Pete Reid stated that decreasing BID levy funding as a result of increasing town centre vacancies presented a risk to the organisation. It was important to note that external funding was also able to be secured. Falkirk Towns Ltd delivering the Falkirk BID (in its promotional name of Falkirk Delivers) had been successful in securing funding from VisitScotland and the Townscape Heritage Initiative to support delivery of promotional activities in the town centre. The Falkirk BID team has also actively sought funding from various external bodies.

Members remarked that Falkirk town centre looked clean and sought further information on the Child Safe Scheme which looked after lost children in the town centre. Mr Reid stated that ensuring the town centre was safe was key to its vibrancy and one of the BID's core activities. He cited joint working with Police Scotland to utilise the CCTV and radio network – Shop Safe. The company operated a radio link scheme with 26 businesses to allow them to keep informed of security issues in real time.

Members praised the various initiatives but expressed concern over the perceived reduction in footfall. Mr Reid concurred that reducing footfall presented a continuing challenge which had seen a marked decrease since the closure of Marks and Spencer. He confirmed the BID levy was charged over and above Non Domestic Rates payments and applicable only to those to businesses within the BID geographical boundary. It was aimed at promoting footfall and delivering other activities and initiatives set out in the report. Falkirk Towns Ltd nor the Council did not specifically monitor footfall, however it monitored the statistics gathered by retailers. There was a clear

need to develop strategies and initiatives to promote town centre activities being delivered through the Town Centre Partnership. In response to a question in regard to a loyalty scheme Mr Reid stated that there were various initiatives in place in towns to promote spend. To date there wasn't a loyalty scheme in place as costs were an inhibiting factor.

The committee then discussed the financing of the Falkirk BID. The Council's funding covered the BID core operating costs which supported the BID business levy of £184k used to deliver projects and services in the area. When the Council's funding decreased there is a knock-on impact on the services provided by Falkirk BID. The BID is reballoted every five years and at each BID ballot there is a risk of negativity around the value of BID and payment of the levy even though it was balloted on by all businesses within the BID area. Such negativity is from perception of value as to what the BID delivers. It was vital that retailers understood the value and benefits of the BID. The next BID ballot was in 2021 – and there was risk that the organisation's reballot might not be successful. It was noted that the organisation should ensure that its message and its benefits are clear and understood. It was vital that all retailers understood the benefits of supporting a BID. Members agreed but reiterated that there would be an issue of sustainability if Council funding continued to decrease and the BID did not secure match funding in the 2021 ballot. Mr Reid stated that this was a national issue as Council budgets are impacted. The Scottish Town Centre Partnership offered support as to BID models, funding and how they can be delivered. Prior to 2021 a BID delivery model and objectives would be set out in the business plan and the vote by Non Domestic Rate payers within the defined BID geographical boundary would be based on the strength of the business plan. The Head of Planning and Economic Development stated that concerns over the future of town centres were prevalent across Scotland. A recent report by the Federation of Small Businesses called for a transformation of the town centre model and for funding to support the transformation. Following a question Mr Duff confirmed that Falkirk BID focussed solely on Falkirk Town Centre and the levy raised was from retailers within the defined geographical boundary of the town centre. Funding to Falkirk Towns Ltd supported work in the other town centres in the Council area. This had decreased over recent years and the service provided had decreased accordingly.

The committee then discussed the objective 'to inspire visitors to enjoy the town centre from day to night. Members questioned whether this objective had been met. The area had a number of attractions such as the Kelpies and the Wheel; however members asked if there was evidence that visitors were attracted to the town centre, in particular at night. Pete Reid suggested that there were signs of successes in this objective. There had been an increase, for example, in the number of European visitors. It was vital to repurpose the town centre from retail solely to for example heritage. There was a 5-star attraction in the town centre (the escape room at Callendar Square). A recent article on the BBC on town centres featured a local gaming business which had moved its operations from online to the town centre. The town had recently been awarded a Ramblers UK national award as the best

neighbourhood for walking. Examples such as these, he stated, showed that there were endeavours to attract visitors to the town centre. In response to a question he confirmed that there had been an increase in hotel trade although there had been a slight decrease in retail trade, possibly due to the closure of Marks & Spencer in the town centre. Between 2009 and 2019 there had been a 15% decrease in retail floor space but there had been a 29% increase in service related floor space. Mr Reid pointed members to a Town Centre Health Check report for 2009 – 2019 which was available online.

The Falkirk BID also looks to support the night time economy by assisting in the support of a safe town centre environment and awards. Changing the town centre from a traditional retailing centre to alternative uses such as leisure and residential living and supporting the growing tourism sector remains a key priority for the Council in which Falkirk Delivers assisted and supported.

Decision

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