

SE8. Following the Public Pound - Poverty and Equalities

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided information under the Following the Public Pound

arrangements for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 for the Council's outcome to make our area a fairer and more equal place to live.

Funding was provided to 5 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 committee.

The organisations funded or monitored by the Council that support this outcome include:

Organisation	Monitoring Service	2019/20 Funding
LGBT Youth Scotland	Children's Services	£29,750
Falkirk CAB	Corporate and Housing Services	£168,490
G'mouth & Bo'ness CAB	Corporate and Housing Services	£98,360
Denny & Dunipace CAB	Corporate and Housing Services	£92,810
MacMillan Money Matters	Corporate and Housing Services	£38,000
Armed Forces Project - Denny CAB	Corporate and Housing Services	£18,000

Sally Buchanan gave an overview of the report, highlighting that the reporting period was the financial year 2019/20 but information had been provided on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the organisations.

The committee then considered the monitoring officers' reports.

In regard to LGBT Youth Scotland the committee remarked that the references by service users were all positive and enquired if there were instances when the feedback was less positive and if so how were they dealt with. Mark Meechan confirmed that he could provide examples where the feedback was not positive and explained that these often highlighted the barriers faced by youths – such as in schools or accessing services. He explained that the role of organisation was to support young people in recognising the barriers and to then develop ways to overcome them. The organisation did not break down the barriers, rather they provided the young people with the tools to overcome them themselves.

In response to a question on the difference between job creation and employability Mr Meechan explained that the organisation worked with individuals from a young age to develop transferable skills, which would make them more employable. In addition to providing support services it liaised with bodies such as the Employee training Unit (ETU) to create an interface to support young people who required additional support while in an ETU programme.

Looking at the organisations objectives, members asked how helping youths attend parades such as the Gay Pride sat within the core objectives. Mark Meechan stated that the role was not to organise the youths to attend but worked with them so that they had the skills and confidence to organise trips themselves. An event such as this was important to the young people and they wanted to become involved with the planning and organisation and also in participating in the event. Again the role of LGBT Youth was to provide the support to allow them to realise their ambition of attending. He cited Purple Friday as an example of an event run by youths supported by the organisation which had been a great success within Falkirk Council.

The committee then asked for detail on the external funding which might be available to the organisation. Mr Meechan explained that the national organisation had a funding unit whose role was to secure external funding whether it was national or local – such as Lottery funding or Cash for Communities. It was the young people who applied for the funding for events etc. A small amount of development funding was available from the national body but largely funding was applied for by the young people. Again this was instructive and allowed the young people to develop the skills needed.

The committee then considered the reports on the 3 Citizens Advice Bureaux and asked for information on their outreach activity. Sally Buchanan replied that while the organisations did look to undertake outreach work and were continually looking for areas where they could reach out their activity in this regard had been severely impacted by covid-19. At the moment their focus was on dealing with current needs and managing demand. They did retain face to face meetings but in a limited capacity to the most vulnerable with most contacts being by telephone or video. As an example she highlighted the support provided to help clients fill in benefit forms. The committee then noted that with 3 organisations there was 3 Chief Executives with 3 management teams and asked whether this has been reviewed as a way of releasing funding to front line services. Sally Buchanan said that the Council had explored, in 2019/20, whether there were benefits in the organisations moving from a grant funding model to a procured services approach. In the end this wasn't pursued. Each organisation was separate and they had argued that there were local advantages in this and in retaining the grant funding model.

The committee praised the work of the 3 CABx noting that demand is bound to increase as the predicted recession hits post pandemic. Members remarked on comments in the local press by a CAB worker that the CABx faced a decrease in funding from the Council. Members made the point that the Council had not set its budget for 2021/22. Sally Buchanan stated that the article had appeared in the Falkirk Herald and the CABx had each distanced themselves from the comments made as they did not represent their views or their relationship with the Council. The committee considered that such comments would cause distress within the community at a very difficult time for many individuals and families and that this was regrettable given the excellent service they provided.

The committee then turned to the Armed Services Advice Project and asked if there was detail on the client base and whether there were reasons that the clientele was predominately from the Army rather than Navy or RAF other than this being the largest of the 3 services. Ewan McWilliams undertook to provide a response to this question.

Following a question Kenny Gillespie stated that in regard to housing, veterans were a top priority and it was not the case that they couldn't get housing because it was being allocated to other groups in preference. Veterans were Priority 1 if they were homeless.

The committee then turned to MacMillan Money Matters. George Paul confirmed that if Falkirk Council was aware that an individual had cancer it would as a matter of course signpost them to the organisation. Members praised the role of MacMillan Money Matters and indicated that the Council received a good service from the organisation. George Paul agreed and highlighted the level of service compared to the funding, which favoured the Council.

Decision

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