

SE22. 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 2020 to 31 March 2021 for the Council's outcome to make our area a fairer and more equal place to live.

Funding was provided 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 committee.

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

Organisation	Monitoring Service	2020/21 Funding
LGBT Youth Scotland	Children's Services	£29,750
Citizen's Advice Bureaux Grangemouth & Bo'ness, Denny & Dunipace, Falkirk	Corporate and Housing Services	£337,664
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 2020/21.

The committee first considered LGBT Youth Scotland who had the agreed outcome to 'Provide a range of positive opportunities for LGBT young people by providing youth groups and opportunities to gain accreditation'. It asked what was meant by accreditation. Mark Meehan explained it related to awards such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Youth Achievement Awards and Solitaire Awards all of which were carried out on a voluntary basis. The staff of LGBT Youth Scotland were in place to support young people to participate.

Following a question regarding how long the Council had funded LGBT Youth Scotland, the Community Learning & Development Manager clarified funding began in 2016/17, however, 2020 was the first year it was agreed at Council to fund on an annual basis rather than 3-yearly.

The Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator clarified to committee that the disparity between busyness and the number of issues identified within the Citizens Advice Bureaux between Denny & Dunipace, Falkirk and Grangemouth & Bo'ness was complex. Falkirk was traditionally the busiest hub, however, Grangemouth & Bo'ness identified more issues which could be reflective of the different working practices or the needs of those who came in. Ms Buchanan referred to the added complexity that Covid-19 had

brought when analysing figures, however, despite restrictions directly impacting on service, the Citizen's Advice Bureaux adapted to remain open. The bureaux had reopened, however, triage services were in place to limit face-to-face consultations to those who could not be supported in any other way.

Denny & Dunipace had recruited 8 new volunteers in 2020/21, in the same period Falkirk and Grangemouth & Bo'ness had not recruited any. The committee wanted to know what method of recruitment Denny & Dunipace Citizen's Advice Bureaux had used to achieve this. The Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator suggested it could be caused by campaigns, actively looking to recruit due to turnover or another impact of the pandemic. Ms Buchanan agreed to come back to committee with more information and assured committee that good practice, such as recruitment, was already being shared between the 3 bureaux.

Members referred to the Citizen's Advice Bureaux's historical partnership with From Me To You and wanted to know if any other partnerships were ongoing. Ms Buchanan explained that prior to the pandemic, all 3 bureaux carried out outreach work but had been curtailed due to restrictions. She stated that now was the correct time to reopen these services and reintroduce in-person discussions. The Fairer Falkirk Senior Co-Ordinator assured committee she would raise discussion on the progress of outreach work at the Joint Working Meeting the following week.

In 2020/21, 10 additional locations were covered on an outreach basis covering a significant proportion of the Council area and members asked how this was carried out. Ms Buchanan suggested it may have been through a contact referral rather than a referral on premises, however, would refer back to committee with more information.

By the end of 2020, £2,602,502.72 additional benefits were received by clients in the Falkirk area due to the work from the 3 bureaux – this was £5,199,895.13 in the previous year. The reason for the reduction was partially due to face-to-face tribunals stopping causing a back log in appeal hearings and therefore delaying any financial gain from successful outcomes. The committee asked what impact this had on claimants. George Paul clarified that tribunals adapted to video-calls which began to tackle the back log and face-to-face tribunals had begun. Those awaiting tribunal would continue to receive benefits and the Scottish Welfare Fund could be utilised.

The committee noted that Forth Valley Macmillan Money Matters Project had exceeded their target to support 400 people as they achieved 450 and asked if there was any more capacity. The Corporate & Housing Team Leader explained that the majority of those engaging with the service were on a DS1500. One impact of the pandemic had been a lateness in diagnosis of cancer and consequently, a higher rate of terminal cases. Furthermore, certificates issued by GPs had led to a reduction in administrative work for those part of Macmillan Money Matters therefore an increase in allocating money.

The Corporate & Housing Team Leader clarified that, as of yet, no individual had been turned away from the service. Mr Paul explained that Stirling Council had been successful at raising additional funds as well as additional staff members within hospitals providing help, thus reducing pressure on Macmillan Money Matters.

Decision

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