Representation by Rainbow Muslim Women's Group (RMWG) in relation to an Application for Review Submitted by Falkirk Thornhill Community Hall (FTCH)

Response on behalf of Rainbow Muslim Women's Group SCIO (RMWG)

RMWG thanks FTCH, existing user groups and local residents for their submissions. We recognise the strong attachment many people have to Thornhill Community Centre and we share the objective of ensuring the building remains a sustainable and inclusive community asset for current and future generations.

At the outset, it is important to note that FTCH's submission contains a substantial number of allegations regarding individuals, Council officers, governance matters and operational disputes. Many of these matters are disputed, are not relevant to the statutory assessment of the Community Asset Transfer request, or relate to ongoing disagreements arising from the temporary licence arrangements rather than the merits of the competing transfer applications.

The Review Committee's Role

RMWG agrees that the Review Committee must undertake its own assessment of the competing applications. However, that assessment should remain focused on the statutory criteria set out within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the relative merits of the asset transfer proposals themselves. The review is not a forum for determining every operational or interpersonal disagreement that has arisen during a temporary management arrangement.

Collaboration

FTCH suggests that RMWG has consistently refused collaboration. This characterisation is not accepted.

The Council facilitated extensive discussions between both organisations over a prolonged period, including mediation and exploration of various options. Despite these efforts, no mutually acceptable agreement was reached. The fact that no agreement emerged reflects the inability of both parties to reach a shared position rather than a refusal by one party alone. This reality was recognised by the Council and formed part of the context leading to the review process.

Existing Community Users

RMWG fully acknowledges the important contribution made by existing user groups and has repeatedly stated its commitment to continued community access and use of the Centre. Any suggestion that RMWG seeks to exclude existing users is incorrect.

Our proposal has always been based on securing the long-term future of the Centre while expanding the range of services, opportunities and activities available to the wider

community. We recognise the value of the groups currently operating from the Centre and remain committed to supporting broad community use.

Operational Disputes

A significant portion of FTCH's submission concerns disputes relating to invoices, booking arrangements, operational rules, access arrangements and day-to-day management issues arising under the current licence arrangements. These matters have been the subject of extensive correspondence between the parties and each side presents a different account of events.

RMWG respectfully submits that such disputes should not distract from the central question before the Committee: which applicant is best placed to secure the asset and deliver long-term community benefit. Isolated disputes under a temporary licence arrangement do not outweigh the independent assessment already undertaken by Council officers of the competing asset transfer proposals.

Officer Assessment

FTCH bases much of its review case on criticism of the original assessment process. However, the Council's assessment concluded that both applications were strong and that RMWG achieved the higher overall score. Council officers ultimately recommended transfer to RMWG following detailed evaluation of governance, community benefit, sustainability and deliverability.

While FTCH disagrees with aspects of that assessment, disagreement with professional judgement does not, of itself, demonstrate that the assessment was flawed or that the recommendation should be disregarded. No substantive evidence has been presented that undermines the overall conclusions reached by officers.

Allegations Regarding Council Officers and Process

FTCH raises numerous allegations regarding Council officers, elected members and procedural fairness. These are serious assertions. However, they remain allegations and should not be treated as established fact.

The Committee should be cautious about attaching weight to unproven claims when determining the future ownership of a significant community asset. Unless supported by clear evidence and findings from the appropriate authority, such matters should not detract from consideration of the competing applications on their merits.

Conclusion

RMWG respects the commitment shown by FTCH and recognises the valuable work carried out by many groups currently using the Centre.

However, the purpose of this review is to determine which application best satisfies the statutory criteria and delivers the greatest overall community benefit.

Following a thorough assessment, Council officers concluded that RMWG's proposal represented the stronger application and recommended transfer accordingly. The extensive operational disputes, speculative assertions and procedural allegations contained within FTCH's review submission do not alter the fundamental merits of RMWG's application or provide a sufficient basis for rejecting the original recommendation.

Accordingly, RMWG respectfully requests that the Review Committee approve RMWG's Community Asset Transfer application for Thornhill Community Centre.

Rainbow Muslim Women's Group