Finance Committee

Scottish Futures Trust/ NPD Programme

Submission from Walters & Cohen Architects

The Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) was established by the Scottish Government in 2008. Its website states that its mission is ‘to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure investment and use in Scotland by working collaboratively with public bodies and industry, leading to better value for money and improved public services’.

The Committee is interested in hearing views on the success of the SFT in achieving this aim and specifically:

Introduction
Walters & Cohen’s involvement with Scottish Futures Trust (SFT) was through a competition to develop a reference scheme for Scottish primary schools that fitted cost and area metrics and responded to the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. SFT’s role was pivotal because it not only had the foresight to go to competition with the project, but also then led on the competition process and sought out a local authority partner.

Walters & Cohen then supported the local authority in developing out a specific scheme that, most importantly, would become a reference primary school that could be rolled out in different shapes, sizes and in different contexts and forms across Scotland.

The SFT’s role in securing additional investment
The SFT was involved in every stage of the competition process and was engaged in a large amount of consultation to make sure that Walters & Cohen was really providing the best education environment possible. Value for money was a central consideration in that it needed to be carefully considered.

The SFT’s role in securing better value for money and improved public service
In this case, value for money should not be conflated with the lowest possible price. SFT reiterated that it was about flexibility, robustness and exceeding expectations at an affordable price rather than simply cutting costs. If it was not for SFT, there would have been no competition, and therefore no dialogue about primary school spaces and about their vision for education spaces in the 21st century and what education spaces can be in Scotland.
The SFT's role in fostering innovation to improve outcomes
In the brief of the competition, SFT talked about a blueprint for primary schools that was not only about building, but also about the site, surrounding landscape and furniture. So when we came round to designing our proposal, we were encouraged to comment on the whole environment of primary schools in Scotland, as well as the immediate context of the site in Kirkintilloch.

The SFT's role in encouraging collaboration to improve efficiency
During the competition process, which was over a period of ten weeks, we met with the local authority, school and SFT no less than six times and discussed both in detail and in concept how the buildings would function. Ultimately, while there was a considerable acknowledgment for both the school and the local authority that they were getting something innovative, SFT wanted something general, and not exclusive to the site in Kirkintilloch. SFT always had it in mind that the project we developed would be suitable for the rest of the country.

Another thing that SFT did well was that they made it clear from the start that the primary school at Lairdsland would be used as a case study that people visit and use as a model. This was started at the competition process, when the SFT and the local authority visited schools that Walters & Cohen had previously designed to speak about concepts; the idea of learning from the past is something that they took on board from a very early stage.

The SFT's efficacy in securing better outcomes including job creation, training and apprenticeships, environmental sustainability, broader community benefits and digital connectivity
Although we cannot comment on this directly, what we can say is that the sustainability and broader community benefits were central to the project. It was predicated on benefiting the locals in Kirkintilloch, and it was a building that could not be built without consideration of this and we provided a project that was unique to the site and the local community.

Any other comments you might have on the SFT's work towards achieving its key aims.
As an architecture practice, we have entered many open competitions and specifically several competitions to provide exemplars. What was really clever about the SFT was that the parameters and guidelines were simple in that we were asked to work to a maximum area, maximum cost per m2 and to respond to the Scottish Curriculum of Excellence. As a piece of research, we were afforded the space in which, as a team, we could really explore what this project could mean to Scottish primary school education, and, being
encouraged to build from the inside-out, to understand what was really needed in Scotland.

To end on a piece of advice, although the competition was carried out in 2011 and 2012 and the budget and areas were things that weren’t easy to achieve, they were nonetheless not unrealistic. The key thing here is that the inflation of the market and the cost changes associated must be appreciated, and that SFT should continue to strive to improve learning environments in Scotland.