

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 11th September, 2012

Present:- Councillor Mrs Elizabeth Shenton – in the Chair

Councillors Cairns, Mrs Johnson, Matthews, Olszewski, Miss Walklate and Mrs Williams

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Eastwood, Councillor Mrs Heames, Councillor Sweeney and Councillor M. Taylor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received as follows:

- Councillor Cairns – Park Road, Silverdale Community Centre Management Committee and Silverdale Social Centre Community Centre Management Committee.
- Councillor Mrs Johnson – Red Street Community Centre Management Committee.
- Councillor Matthews – Marsh Hall Community Centre Management Committee.
- Councillor Miss Walklate – Harriet Higgins Community Centre Management Committee and Whitfield Community Centre Management Committee.
- Councillor Mrs Williams – Treasurer, Ramsey Road Community Centre Management Committee.

The Chair had sought advice regarding pecuniary interests from the Council's Head of Central Services. The membership of a community centre committee was likely to be a non-pecuniary interest. However, it would ultimately be the decision of Members where they have such an interest, to declare it if they considered it necessary.

3. MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

4. COMMUNITY CENTRE REVIEW

The Committee considered a draft report to Cabinet regarding the Community Centre Review and received a joint presentation from the Head of Leisure and Cultural Services and the Portfolio Holder for Stronger and Active Neighbourhoods. The presentation covered the main points from the draft report that would be considered by Cabinet on 17 October 2012.

The budget for community centres would remain, there was no question of it being cut and it was important to provide this service for the community. There had been misleading press reports previously regarding community centres closing down that had caused panic amongst people who had booked rooms. There was a desire for transparency and openness during the Community Centre Review.

Financial sustainability was one of the main aims of the review. It was necessary to gain an understanding of why some centres were doing better than others. With regard to governance and lease arrangements, some community centres were very reliant on Council involvement, whereas others managed these areas on their own. There was no legal lease between the Council and community centres. An agreement from the mid 1990s was still in force and due to legislative changes many agreements were no longer fit for purpose. A representative from the Legal department would sit on the officer working group.

There were practical building problems associated with the community centres, such as the upkeep and modernisation of buildings. Standards varied dramatically across centres and there were unique issues. There were also security issues, which were mainly at the less used centres.

There would be three phases to the review. The first would be a quantitative research phase from October 2012 to March 2013. There would then be a qualitative research phase from April 2013 to July 2013. Finally there would be an interim report at the end of July 2013 and then a final report in September 2013.

There was external funding available that the Council could access. Management committees could sometimes feel isolated and it was hoped that the review would bring all of the management committees together with the possibility of a federation of management committees. For example, the cost of heating was very high and it was questioned if all of the community centres could come together to buy fuel and save money. It was asserted that the volunteers did an excellent job and as part of the review the management committees would be invited to a meeting to inform them of the progress of the review and to ascertain their ideas. The aim of the review was to get more local groups into community centres and to ensure nice, clean and well maintained buildings for community use.

Members considered that the review was a positive step and were pleased to learn that management committees would be spoken to as part of the review. Many management committees were at different stages and had differing levels of experience. It must be ensured that the less experienced were not at a disadvantage. Some management committees would have a good idea of where they were at and the problems they have.

Members noted that some centres were used by a lot of people and some were not and questioned what Members and Officers could do to aid the process as it progressed. This was the exact problem that the review hoped to address, and it was noted that people wanted more from community centres than just to hire a room. The problem was getting the community to use community centres and Members questioned what the Council would be prepared to put in to the community centres to encourage the public to use them. Community centres were in direct competition with other local venues and needed a unique selling point.

The timescales and funding were considered by Members and they questioned whether funding would be available during the review should it be needed by a community centre. It was confirmed that the budget was there for the running and maintenance of the community centres throughout the review and safety checks would continue. The possibility of external funding would be investigated. It was questioned whether there was one pot for all community centres, and Officers confirmed that this was the case and funding was spent on a priority basis.

The Chair questioned if the Portfolio Holder for Stronger and Active Neighbourhoods was happy with the length of the review. Twelve months was a lengthy amount of time, but there was a lot of work to be undertaken. It was questioned whether the shadow scrutiny review group could do anything to help to shorten the review period. There were two reasons why a generous amount of time needed to be allowed for the review. Firstly, the views of quite a wide range of people needed to be ascertained. Secondly, the review needed to be incorporated into already busy work programmes. It was necessary to set a realistic timetable to include a good consultation process in the review and to take people along during the review. It was about taking the time to understand the issues and to see how community centres could be supported. It was not about the Council making a harmful decision for the Community.

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee had been requested to establish a task and finish group for the Community Centre Review. The Chair of the Committee affirmed that any scrutiny of the community centres must be done on a holistic level by the Committee. Members considered that the scrutiny task and finish group needed to be set up straight away.

The Committee agreed that a Member task and finish group would be set up. The task and finish group would not help with the practical work of the review but would assist in such aspects as setting the correct consultation questions and to interpret the responses. It was noted that a line could be added to the review timetable to illustrate the task and finish group input to the review. It was agreed that the task and finish group should not be exclusively made up of Co-ordinating Committee members. Ideally the task and finish group would consist of six Members and would be a mix of Members who sat on management committees and those who did not. The Group Leaders would be written to and invited to submit nominations for the task and finish group from their groups. It was clarified that the task and finish group did not need to be politically balanced. If more than six nominations were received then the Chair would choose the members of the task and finish group. If a borderline number of nominations were received, near to the ideal six members, then all of the nominations would be invited to form the task and finish group.

RESOLVED: (a) That the information be received.

(b) That a Member task and finish group be set up for the Community Centre Review.

(c) That a letter be sent to all of the Group Leaders inviting them to nominate Members from their group to sit on the task and finish group.

5. **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business considered.

COUNCILLOR MRS ELIZABETH SHENTON
Chair