

Update Briefing on Review of Council Community Centres Cooperative and Communities Scrutiny Committee 19 March 2014

Background

In October 2012 Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Cooperative and Communities Scrutiny review of the management of the Council's 6 community centres. Cabinet agreed that a programme of work would be developed and delivered to review the community centres to ensure that the Council's centres focused on addressing local need within the community, whilst delivering the service as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Cabinet adopted a number of key principles for the delivery of this programme of work including the establishment of a project steering group to oversee the ongoing review, a review of each centre which needed to engage the Parish or Town Council and the community and continued improvement in the range of activities and promotion of the centres.

Scrutiny recommended that the centre in **Priorslee** was returned to Estates and Investments to be managed as part of the Council's property portfolio on a lease agreement, as the size and current use of the building did not lend itself to development as a community centre. This transfer has taken place and the pre-school continue to lease this building.

Progress Update

Steering Group

The steering group was established and comprised of a number of partners including a representative from the Parish Forum, TCAT, CVS and a range of Council services. The Steering Group set the direction for the review which involved a programme of consultation, discussions with a number of voluntary organisations and engagement with local Town and Parish Councils. The steering group brought a range of skills and expertise to the group and although the remaining 5 centres continue to be managed by the Council the group helped to consider a number of options around possible involvement of voluntary organisations in the management of some of the centres. Although this hasn't resulted in a formal transfer of responsibility to another organisation this input has helped to shape the current working arrangements for the community centres, and we would therefore like to thank the partners and other Council colleagues for their input and support.

Management of the Community Centres

As part of the Council's ongoing need to make efficiency savings the Cooperative Council and Commercial Delivery Team were given savings and income targets to deliver over a period of 3 years. As most of the budgets within the team relate to staffing costs, this meant that the only way to realise these savings was through a further restructure of the teams within the Cooperative Council and Commercial Delivery Team. The Community Participation Team has a number of priorities that they need to deliver including supporting

the council to deliver equalities and community engagement, leading on social regeneration within the 6 Targeted Intervention Areas, and developing the Council's Community Centres.

In order to support the delivery of these priorities new roles were developed as part of the restructure. The lead responsibility for managing and developing the community centres now sits across 7 posts; this work had previously been delivered by 3 staff with management support. These roles have changed to ensure that the team are responsible for delivering a programme of wider community involvement within the community centres and in the Targeted Intervention Areas. The aim is to increase the numbers of residents that are involved with improving their local area and their local community centre where applicable. The responsibility for the community centres and the Targeted Intervention Areas now sits across the whole Community Participation Team so that there is greater capacity to deliver these important priorities. The Scrutiny review of the Community Centres identified that the centres that operated most effectively were those that had a regular staff presence, the restructure has assisted in achieving a higher level of staff presence across the community centres which will be supported by increased service user and resident involvement. The new structure became operational in January 2014, and new income targets will be assigned to each community centre in the new financial year. Business plans to deliver against these targets are currently being developed.

Consultation and Engagement

A number of surveys have been carried out to seek the views of existing and potential community centre users. A general survey was carried out with Community Panel members in June 2013 and then specific surveys were carried out on line and on paper which related to each of the 5 centres. These surveys gathered information relating to the levels of usage, satisfaction with the building, customer service, activities available and explored why people do or don't use the community centres. The survey also identified if people would like to get more involved in the community centres. The results have been used to identify further areas of improvement within the centres, and to identify what works well so that this can be replicated across the centres.

Brookside Community Centre

There has been an intensive programme of community engagement relating to the Brookside Community Centre as Brookside was the Cooperative Council pilot area and the centre is currently undergoing a significant refurbishment. Existing users and residents have been heavily involved in shaping the programme of refurbishment for the Brookside Centre which is currently closed to enable the refurbishment to take place. Residents have made a significant input into the plans for the Brookside Centre. Prior to the closure of the building the cafe was being run by a group of residents as part of the Community Interest Company. They have recently carried out an evaluation of their pilot which will be used to assess future models for the refurbished cafe within the centre when it re-opens.

Review of Policy and Procedures

The team have continued to review the policies and procedures relating to the community centres including pricing structures, volunteering procedures, health and safety and booking processes. The team have developed a volunteer pack to ensure that volunteers are supported and placed appropriately within the centres and it is envisaged that further volunteer opportunities will be developed through the centres now the new staffing structure

is in place. The booking procedure has also been reviewed and we will be implementing a new booking process which will allow bookings to be made centrally and the team to be able to view bookings for each centre. The responsibility for billing and invoicing will also be held centrally within the Cooperative and Commercial administrative support team; this will release staff within the Community Participation Team to focus on developing the business within the centre and increasing resident involvement.

Marketing and Publicity

The team have been working closely with colleagues within Corporate Communications to develop the marketing strategy for the community centres. This includes improved branding, a programme of promotion and improved information held on the website. The team already update the local Facebook pages with the programme of events and a 'What's On' is produced for each centre and posted on local notice boards.

Physical Improvements

A programme of physical improvements has been carried out across the centres including decoration, a replacement boiler, replacement carpets, upgrades to ICT equipment and installation of Wi-Fi. Details of the improvements to each centre can be seen in **Appendix 1**. The team have worked hard with partners and have been able to secure a number of donations including furniture from a private sector company and other areas within the Council and funding from Hadley and Leegomery Parish Council to install ICT equipment within Leegomery Community Centre. Positive feedback has been received from users on the improvements to the centres.

Ongoing Work Programme

As outlined above the new staffing structure was put in place in January 2014 so new staff have been familiarising themselves with the centres and their new role. The team will continue to deliver a programme of development of the community centres which will include the following; a review of the community cafes, review of key holding and cleaning arrangements, an ongoing programme of community involvement and engagement and delivery of a marketing and publicity strategy. Further developments planned for each centre are also summarised in Appendix 1.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of those that have been involved in the review of the community centres over the past 2 years. A significant amount of work has gone into developing the centres which has provided a good foundation for us to move forward. The staff within the Community Participation Team have all worked hard on this piece of work and particular thanks must go to Sarah Durnall and Wendy Tonge who have led the work up to this point. We have also received significant support from Members, partners and other Council colleagues which has been very much appreciated.

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