

## **CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

### **Minutes of a meeting of Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014 at 2.00pm at Sutton Hill Community Centre, 103 Southgate, Sutton Hill, Telford TF7 4HG.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors A. McClements (Chair), N. England, A. Jhawar, J. Pinter.

Also attending: R. Jones, Community Participation Manager; W. Tonge, Community Involvement Manager; S. Durnall, Community Involvement Officer; A. James, Youth & Community Team Leader; N. Raja, Involvement Officer; S. Jones, Scrutiny Officer.

#### **CCSC-01 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllrs. J. Seymour, J. Thompson, K. Tomlinson and Co-optee John Ellis  
Cabinet Member Cllr. S. Davies.

#### **CCSC-02 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

#### **CCSC-03 MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY CENTRES**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting which was to receive an update on progress in implementing the recommendations in the committee's report on the Management of Community Centres. An update report had been circulated as Appendix A. She thanked staff at Sutton Hill Community Centre for hosting the meeting so that members could see first hand how things had changed since the review was carried out. She was sorry that Cllr. Bentley was unable to attend the meeting as he had done such a lot of work on the review.

The review had been extensive and the committee had visited all the Council's community centres and others run by other organisations. The committee had concluded that the centres should remain under Council management except that Priorlsee should be transferred to estates and managed as a commercial let, and had made 18 recommendations on how the centres should be developed. She invited the officers present to present the progress report.

The Community Participation Manager made some opening remarks:

- That the update report provided an overview of progress did not bring to life all the fantastic work that had been done.
- She thanked scrutiny for its work; the review had put the community centres on the agenda and the report had given a steer and provided a framework for the development of the centres.
- The development of the community centres had been taken on as a priority for the

Community Participation Team and the team had been restructured around delivery of this as one of the key priorities. Responsibility for development of the centres now sat across the whole team instead of, as previously, with 3 staff.

- There had been a lot of hard work and some real successes since the scrutiny review. The new team had come into post in January 2014 and she was confident it would go from strength to strength. Members were welcome to visit the other centres to see what a difference there was.
- Partners were involved via the Steering Group and there had been conversations about how they could be involved and a work programme was in place.
- Any new ideas from scrutiny would be welcome.
- The Manager put on record her thanks to the team in particular Wendy Tonge and Sarah Durnall, for their hard work in making things happen and handed over to them to give a presentation.

The officers presented photographs to show how the centres had been improved and gave a snap shot of some of the activities in each centre as follows:

- There had been 6 community centres. The key challenges were lack of investment and lack of community consultation and involvement. There had been questions about the future of the centres. Following scrutiny's recommendation the centre in Priorslee was transferred to estates and property to manage as a commercial let which had been complex and taken a lot of work. This left 5 community centres. All the centres had been redecorated, refurbished and Wifi enabled. Staff had "begged and borrowed" wherever possible to save money.
- Donnington Wood Lifelong Learning Centre  
The centre was 14 years old and was well used. They had spoken to users to find out how they felt about the centre. It had been redecorated and re-carpeted with cut-offs from the carpets at Addenbrook House; the IT centre had been upgraded; chairs had been donated by Stirchley Centre and unwanted items had been taken from Civic Office; the cafe was being used by builders from the housing development next door; work had been done with local residents and volunteers to encourage their involvement and would be built on; feedback from users on the changes was good.
- Watling Street Community Centre  
The centre had been redecorated and new carpets fitted. The Arleston residents group had been involved in choosing the paint colour and the decoration. The residents group had secured £10k funding from UK Coal for a new kitchen which would improve resources and help make the centre more of a hub for the local community. They had worked with Community Payback on bedding plants outside the centre to increase its appeal and create a welcoming feel. A community development worker had been in post for 2 months funded by AFC Telford and had already had a big impact with 3-4 successful events.
- Sutton Hill Community Centre  
Prior to the meeting the Involvement Officer had given the members a tour of the facilities and the Youth & Community Team Leader had showed members around the adjoining youth centre. The centre had been Wifi enabled. Members were shown the ICT suite which had been relocated from a smaller room into a bigger room and was being used for a Job Junction session run jointly with TCAT which

was buzzing. Members also saw the main hall which was being used for indoor bowls, and the cafe bar in the main hall, which were hired out to different groups. There were different rates for different types of organisation to encourage and support voluntary and community groups. A “Friends of Sutton Hill” group was being set up which would be able to bid for external funding. Members also visited the adjoining youth centre which was used to deliver universal and targeted support for young people in Sutton Hill, and heard some of the ideas for training courses which could be delivered from there. The outdoor space shared by the community and youth centres had been cleared by volunteers and the idea was to turn it into a space for family social events. There was a soft seating area at the front of the centre, which had been refurbished and Premiere Inn had donated and delivered chairs worth around £250 per pair. The Involvement Officer said the cafe was starting to be well used and people had started dropping into the centre just to use the cafe. He said it was starting to feel like a thriving community centre.

- Leegomery Community Centre

The building had been tired but had been repainted which had delighted the pre-school. Hadley and Leegomery Parish Council had gifted £10k towards an IT suite so that TCAT courses and Job Junction could be run from the centre which was a good opportunity for local people. The cafe had had a facelift and now felt much more inviting. Work was being done with a commercial catering company to review the cafes in all the community centres to explore ways of improving and developing them.

- Brookside Community Centre

Brookside community centre was closed for major refurbishment as part of the £6.2m regeneration of the centre which included shops and the community centre. Local residents had been consulted and had seen the design of the new building which would have a glass entrance, new reception area, multi-use offices, cafe, main hall, a pre-school with outdoor space, class rooms, a quiet room, an updated training room, hygiene suite (the first in Telford) with hoists for adult changing, linked to outdoor space and youth groups. The space had been designed to be flexible so the classrooms could be opened up for social hiring. The corridors had been designed to be wide so they could be used for exhibitions. Local groups had taken ownership of decisions about the centre: the Brookside Improvement Group played a key role and had been successful in obtaining £1m Lottery funding that would be invested over 10 years; the Brookside Events Group have also organised fund raising events; the Brookside Community Interest Company were interested in running the cafe; the Bikes and Recycling social enterprise was looking at using the centre – they make old bicycles safe and resell them, and were hoping to take on an apprentice.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation and commended them on the fantastic amount of work they had done. She had personally seen what a difference there had been in the Watling Street Centre. Before, it had been unused and unloved. The residents had been involved in choosing the paint for the centre and the redecoration had made a big difference. The notice boards were now up to date. It was starting to have a big impact on the community and residents were starting to feel part of it. She also reminded members that scrutiny had recommended taking a

phased approach to developing the centres because of the amount of work involved and said it was fantastic that all the centres had moved ahead so much all at once.

Members then asked a number of questions:

- The Chair said scrutiny had been concerned that that TCAT had withdrawn delivery of courses from some centres and wanted to know how this was being addressed. The Community Involvement Officer explained they had been working with TCAT on this. TCAT's funding was attached to the number of learners and their ability to draw down funding was linked to centre usage to enable TCAT to attract the number of students to make courses viable. The first step had been to invest in and upgrade the IT suites in Leegomery and Sutton Hill to increase capacity and attract users so there were enough learners for TCAT to deliver courses. The idea was that they would then see a return on investment from usage by TCAT.
- The Chair asked how they were increasing usage. The Community Involvement Officer explained there were new ways of working and staff had been given a target to increase income by £4000 over previous levels. The transfer of Priorisee and the closure of Brookside had impacted on income but they were not far off achieving the target.
- Cllr. England asked about the finances, whether the centres were subsidised by the Council and if they calculate the cost per user. The Community Involvement Manager explained there were 2 budgets – the Participation Team hold the staff budget and Asset & Property hold the building budget. Cllr. Jhawar asked whether the centres were losing money before and if the idea now was to generate income. The Participation Manager said they had followed scrutiny's recommendation that the priority for the centres should be community benefit and not profit generation. The staff had done a lot of work to develop the centres as community assets meeting the needs of the local community and not as commercial operations. This was why the scrutiny review had been very helpful in deciding the priorities, but it may be helpful to analyse costs against number of users.
- Cllr. Jhawar asked how they measure success. There were several ways:
  - what people say about the centres, and feedback had improved
  - the contribution of the centres to reducing deprivation, and there were lots of outcomes
  - increasing usage, and they had seen a difference
  - meeting financial targets – the priority was community benefit rather than making money. Leegomery made money because rooms were let out because of the layout of the building and there was little community benefit so there is a balance. The Chair said they needed to look at both and Cllr. Jhawar agreed that community and financial success were different. The Involvement Manager said that the scrutiny review had said that the priority should be community benefit and so that's what they had focussed on. They had come a

long way in a short space of time but there was still a long way to go. They needed to develop a marketing plan to attract more events to bring in more income but needed to be mindful of not losing focus on community benefit.

- The Chair asked if the idea of a Community Board (of centre managers) had progressed. There was a strong relationship with the centre managers at the Park Lane Centre and Dawley Centre who had been really supportive. They had donated some of the furniture and were sharing information.
- The Chair asked how ward members had been involved. Ward members had been asked for their views and there had been informal discussions with individual members about centres in their ward for example with Cllr. White and Cllr. Mackenzie. The level of involvement varied between members. Cllr. Davies had been very involved in Brookside but the other centres were different and involvement and opportunities depended on the building, but they always tried to contact the relevant ward members to seek their views.
- The Chair asked about engagement of Town and Parish Councils. All relevant Town and Parish Councils had been informed about the review of the centres and asked for their input. Hadley & Leegomery Parish Council had made a donation. The Clerk from Madeley Town Council had sought the views of the councillors and meetings had been held there.
- The Chair asked about the use of outdoor space. The Involvement Officer from Sutton Hill said the outdoor space had been cleared and there were plans to use it for family events. In Watling Street Community Payback had been involved in outside work. The use of outdoor space would be considered as part of the development of the centres.
- The Chair asked if there was the potential to link the community centres to the Pride in Your Community investment. The Community Involvement Manager said there was a big opportunity to identify community projects which could be linked to Pride in Your Community. The Chair said that it had been done in Watling Street where the Street Champions been really involved and they had got other people involved in projects. The Participation Manager said one of the benefits of the restructure was that staff were not tied to one centre but were responsible for the whole remit and the Chair said she could see the benefit of this in Watling Street.
- Cllr. England asked about the future development plan and whether there was a 3 year investment plan. The Community Involvement Manager said it depended on the budget and there was no 3 year commitment now. Two year business plans were being developed but corporately there was no more money so they had to be creative. They were linking into other organisations such as Town and Parish Council, the Youth Offending Service, Probation etc. to develop a co-operative culture and maximise resources. Residents groups stood a better chance of securing external funding so “Friends of....” groups were being developed so they could bid for funding. For example, the Council was not

eligible to apply for the UK Coal funding, but the local residents group had bid for and won £10k for the kitchen for Watling Street.

- The Chair commented that the restructure meant there were fewer staff overall but an increase in capacity for the community centres and she asked how this had affected key holding arrangements. The Participation Manager said the restructure meant there was increased on-site presence but it was not as good as it could be and the next phase was to look at community key holding. This had started in the Watling Street Centre where the community development worker was a key-holder.

There were no further questions.

The Participation Manager told members that she could not be more proud of the team and what an amazing job Sarah and Wendy had done. They had worked very hard to persuade people to give furniture and equipment to the centres which could not otherwise have been afforded.

The Chair thanked the staff and congratulated them on their achievements over the last 18 months. There had been good progress on implementing the 18 scrutiny recommendations and there was more to do but they were getting there.

The Community Involvement Manager said that thanks were due to Cllr. Davies in his absence for leading the work. She said the 2 year business plan was being developed and they would welcome the opportunity of bringing this to scrutiny for input and this was agreed by members.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- **That the update be noted**
- **That the business plan be brought to a future meeting**

#### **CCSC-04    CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair reminded members that an e-mail had been circulated suggesting that issues related to the welfare reforms should be brought together for consideration at the next meeting as follows:

- Update on the full year impact of the welfare reforms with Budget & Finance
- Support for adults with learning disabilities who have had their benefit sanctioned
- The provision of debt advice and help, particularly preventative work and the role of the credit unions
- Impact of the withdrawal of Local Crisis Assistance funding.

Representatives from partner organisations would be invited to attend. Further work may be agreed at the meeting.

This approach was agreed by members and a date would be agreed by e-mail.

A date would also be agreed by e-mail to look at the community centre business plan.

The meeting ended at 3.30pm

**Chairman:**.....

**Date:**.....