

<p style="text-align: center;">REVIEW OF THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY CENTRES REPORT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE JULY 2012</p>

1. INTRODUCTION

The Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee carried out an in-depth review of the management of the six Council run community centres (Brookside, Donnington Wood Lifelong Learning Centre, Leegomery, Priorslee, Sutton Hill and Watling Centre Arleston) with the aim of making recommendations to the Council's Cabinet on the potential options for the future management of the centres.

The review was carried out following concerns raised with, and by, Members that the community centres were not functioning properly, were under-used and had a poorly developed sense of the needs of the local community. There was a view that the centres were being managed as physical buildings, but were not being developed to their full potential.

A key issue to consider was what the Council's aim for the centres should be - whether the priority should be income generation, or increased community usage (not that these are necessarily mutually exclusive) which may be less profitable but may deliver broader and stronger community benefits and help break down social isolation.

The Committee conducted a wide-ranging review which included visits to all the centres and meetings with key stakeholders plus visits to other non-Council run community centres to look at alternative management models and best practice. A number of challenges and opportunities were identified which are summarised in this report.

Members of the Committee were Cllrs. Angela McClements (Chair), Stephen Bentley, Nathan England, Kevin Guy, Tracy Hope, Amrik Jhawar, Jackie Loveridge and Karen Tomlinson.

2. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the review the Committee concluded that overall the centres should remain in the immediate future within Council ownership and management because of their strategic importance in terms of the communities they serve. Recognising that finances cannot be ignored and opportunities for income generation must be pursued, the Committee felt that the Council's aim for the centres should be to retain and develop them as key community assets supporting and developing capacity within local communities, rather than to pursue a purely commercially driven policy at the expense of local needs.

In the current financial climate, there could be an option to consider disposal of under-performing centres, but the Committee felt this would be a lost opportunity for the Council to engage local partners and people with the centres in a way that would deliver broader social, economic, health and wellbeing benefits as well as being a catalyst for community cohesion.

However, and crucially, the management model must be based on a partnership arrangement: as a Co-operative Council, a key ambition must be for local partners and people to have direct involvement in decisions about the running and activities of the centres – for people to

have a sense of “ownership” – and that the role of the Council should be in supporting communities to help themselves.

The Committee recognised that one-size does not fit all, and have recommended a rolling programme of concerted development work so that there is a business plan for each centre based on local needs. This development work must be led by the Council in conjunction with local partners and residents. The Committee considered carefully whether the management of the centres should remain with the Council over the longer term, and there were minority views that the centres could potentially be handed over to a Town or Parish Council/s, a voluntary organisation or a non-Council management group to manage under leasehold arrangements. These are options which may be explored as part of developing the business plans, but any local solutions must be based on a co-operative model, with co-operative values and the approval of the local community. This is something the Committee will continue to monitor.

With this in mind, the Committee has made a number of recommendations set out below for consideration by Cabinet.

Recommendations

- **Strategic recommendations**

1. It was agreed that one-size does not fit all and that a business plan should be developed for each centre (except Priorslee) which takes account of existing local activity and structures and local needs and wants. This should start with a survey of the views of local people possibly linking into other surveys or engagement work, or in Your Voice if this is localised.
2. The centre in Priorslee functions as a nursery and not as a community centre. It is recommended that it ceases to be considered as a community centre, that the tenancy with the nursery is reviewed and the property transferred to Assets & Property to manage.
3. Members recognise that there is limited staff capacity and that developing five community centres is a significant undertaking. It is therefore recommended that a phased approach is taken so that the centres are developed one at a time, and in the following order: Brookside (currently on-going), Leegomery, Sutton Hill, Watling Centre Arleston, Donnington.
4. Members found the centre in Leegomery to be under-used, with tired decor and not ideally located, but felt that it deserved a concerted effort to revive the centre. An initial piece of work should be done with the community to establish what local people would value in their local community centre and the feasibility of developing a management group similar to that in Admaston. However, if there continued to be sustainability issues the Council should then consider alternative options for the building.

- **Development of partnership arrangements**

5. In all cases the relevant Town and Parish Councils must be consulted.
6. Local voluntary organisations, community and residents groups should be identified, consulted and encouraged to explore their interest in being involved with the management and running of the centres.

7. The opportunities for private sector sponsorship, or in-kind investment, such as Cap Gemini's involvement in Dawley Town Hall, should be explored through the Council's business networks, other networks and local businesses.

8. Communication with TCAT should be improved by having a designated contact officer to ensure that funding opportunities are not lost and issues are resolved quickly.

- **Development issues**

9. All relevant service areas should consider the community centres as venues for delivering services or hosting events, and promoted to partners as potential venues for delivering services and holding events. This should include linking into the Youth Offer to engage and involve younger people and links to public health services, especially when public health responsibility is transferred to the Council.

10. Consideration should be given as to whether the centres could be wi-fi enabled from the existing IT budget or funding by partners or sponsors.

11. The potential for setting up community cafes run by local volunteers should be looked at, similar to that in Donnington, and the option for Donnington to become a food-hygiene training centre should be considered.

12. Consideration should be given to having key-holders from the local community for each centre to improve accessibility. The key holders must have a proper induction to ensure awareness of the Council's policies and procedures and be a welcoming face at the door.

13. Consideration should be given to schemes for volunteers and apprenticeships linked to community centre projects to enable local people to gain new skills and improve their employment opportunities.

14. It was noted that there are unused pockets of land around some of the community centres and consideration should be given to how outside space could be used as part of the development plans for the centres.

15. As part of development work, officers should give consideration to the opportunities and good practice highlighted in section 5 of this report.

16. A "Community Board" of managers from all the community centres in Telford and Wrekin should be set up to share ideas and opportunities for collaboration. Due to resources, this may be a virtual network.

17. The marketing of the community centres on the Council's website should be improved and on-line booking explored.

- **Staff**

18. All lone workers must receive an induction and training on the Council's procedures for lone working as soon as possible after employment.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Community Centres

During 2003/04 ten of the Council's community centres were transferred or outsourced to other providers. The centres in Brookside, Donnington, Leegomery, Sutton Hill and Watling Centre Arlestone remained under Council management because they were strategically important in serving communities within priority areas. Priorslee was originally outsourced, but later brought back in-house leaving six centres within Council management. A profile of the centres is included as Appendix 1. Further information can be found on the website at http://www.telford.gov.uk/a_to_z/service/89/community_centres_and_facilities.

Structure and Staffing

As part of the Council's restructure programme, management of the centres was transferred from Leisure services to the Priority Action Team within the Community Engagement Equalities & Action service area in April 2012, the rationale being that the team's role was to engage and work with local communities to help them to help themselves, and the community centres would be a natural fit within this wider work. The team currently comprises a Community Facilities Team Leader and two Community Facility Managers. The Team Leader is responsible for the overall development of the centres while the two centre Managers deal with the day-to-day operation including key holding, on-site duties, taking bookings and so on. An unfortunate long-term sickness in the team had reduced capacity over the months prior to and during the review.

Finances

Outturn against budget and performance against income targets for 2011/12 for the community centres is attached as Appendix 2.

4. KEY FINDINGS

The Committee's main concern with the centres was under-usage and a lack of community involvement. There was some very good work going on in individual centres which is recognised later in this report, but overall there was room for improvement in a number of key areas:

- The centres were not being used to full capacity, either during opening hours or at evenings and weekends when most of the centres were closed
- With the exception of Brookside, there had not been a systematic period of engagement with partners, community groups or local people to establish wants, needs or potential resources
- There had been a lost opportunity to use the centres to unlock local skills and talent through engagement in the management and running of the centres, enterprise projects such as community cafes or other volunteering opportunities with community based projects focussed around the centres.
- The centres had only recently been transferred to the Priority Action Team, and had not been part of a broader community engagement strategy to improve awareness of and access to Council services for a greater number of people.
- The centres had suffered from a lack on investment with poor facilities and building condition. This made the centres less attractive to hirers and less competitive against newer centres such as Oak Tree and Woodside.

Staff resources and capacity

Staff resources were clearly a critical issue. The Committee recognised that the existing staffing level (described above) meant there was limited capacity for keeping six centres running day-to-day, let alone carrying out more strategic development work. The level of resources had had an impact on:

- The extent of community engagement work
- Capacity to develop and deliver a development and marketing plan for each centre
- Operational impacts such as not having an on-site presence and welcoming face at the door, restrictions on opening hours, demands on staff time from key-holding. Issues were further exacerbated when staff were off sick or on holiday, and members had concerns about safety issues with staff working alone.

Given the Council's financial position and outlook, the Committee has not recommended additional investment in the staffing structure, but did welcome the transfer of community centre management to the Priority Action Team where there is an opportunity to draw on the skills within the wider team. Rather, in recommending a partnership model of management, the Committee is looking to the Council to support the involvement of Town & Parish Councils, partners, voluntary and community groups and local residents so that wider resources and skills can be identified and harnessed. The Committee was particularly keen to see volunteer schemes set up so that there was a welcoming face at the door for members of the public, and to extend access with approved voluntary key-holders.

Centre Development

Drawing up and putting in place sustainable business plans for each centre is a significant undertaking for even one centre, and the Committee has made recommendations about how this should be managed:

- As part of the review, the Committee met members of the Brookside Improvement Group and heard that the community centre was being considered as an integral part of the overall regeneration of Brookside. The Committee was satisfied with progress and would like to see this good work continue.
- The Committee has recommended that the centre in Priorslee should be taken out of community centre management and transferred to Assets & Property to manage as a commercial interest. The centre is small with no office space and only 4 parking places. The centre was occupied Monday-Friday 8.30am-4.00pm by a nursery which limited availability for other activities and functions. Activities during the school holidays had been marketed, but with no take-up which members felt this could be due to the comparative affluence of the area where parents could afford private activities. The Committee therefore concluded that the centre was not functioning as a community centre and should cease to be considered as such.
- For the five remaining centres, the Committee recommended a phased approach to development to ensure that the work remains manageable. Members felt the work in Brookside should continue, with development of the other centres rolled-out in the order of Leegomery, Sutton Hill, Watling Centre Arleston, Donnington. Leegomery had suffered in particular from the remodelling of the shopping centre which meant the community centre was set back and isolated from the shop-front foot-fall, and members recommended this should be the target of early work. Members have not suggested a time scale for this work, and have left it to officers to carry out detailed scoping. However, the emphasis must be on developing sustainable centres with a co-operative model, and not on a "quick fix" approach.

Partnerships, finances and resources

As mentioned previously, the centres have suffered from a lack of investment resulting in some of the buildings being poorly decorated and with poor facilities such as catering and IT which limits their appeal to potential users and ability to compete with new purpose built facilities. Clearly lack of money is an issue and the fact that some of the centres had failed to meet income targets for 2011/12.

Again, given the tightening financial outlook for local authorities, the Committee has not made any recommendations about additional Council-funded investment in the centres, but have made a number of recommendations with the aim of these being delivered from within existing budgets or from working co-operatively with Town & Parish Councils, other partners and local residents to share resources.

The Committee reviewed various external management models - Town & Parish Councils, housing trust, charitable trust, management companies - and considered the option to contract out the management of the centres to a third party. One of the key advantages of an outside management model was the ability to bid for external funding – such as the Big Fund - which is not open to local authorities. However, while the centres remain within Council management, the Committee felt there was plenty of scope to explore alternative sources of both public and private sector funding, as well as to develop income generating schemes to help the centres become financially sustainable. In particular:

- Opportunities to share resources with Town & Parish Council and partners
- To increase hiring income by bringing local partners and residents into scope
- Sign-posting user-groups (or other relevant voluntary/community groups) to the Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) for bid-writing support to attract funding which will benefit the centres
- To identify private sector grants that the Council may attract such as Sita funding (Donnington is in the catchment area) or UK Coal which had funded a new kitchen in the Watling Centre.
- Explore and stimulate private sector funding, sponsorship or in-kind investment, perhaps as part of a staff development programme or corporate social responsibility agenda. A good example was Cap Gemini's involvement with Dawley Town Hall.
- For appropriate facilities – such as Leegomery which has a number of small rooms – the potential for rental income from businesses providing services to the local community such as dentists.
- Telford College of Arts and Technology (TCAT) was a critical and very valued partner, accounting for around 20% of the total income across the centres and providing local access to courses. However, poor communication had led to a loss of provision and income in some centres, and the Committee has made a recommendation aimed at addressing this issue.
- To explore opportunities for social enterprise and volunteer schemes, such as cafes, with the aim of becoming self-financing.

5. DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The Committee visited all the Council managed centres as well as a number of non-Council managed facilities. The visits identified a number of potential development opportunities and examples of good practice that the Committee would like to high-light and recommend for consideration as part of the development plans for all or individual centres.

Brookside Community Centre:

Continue work with the Brookside Improvement Group (BIG) and Parish Community Development Officer including:

- Opportunity for community run cafe creating volunteering opportunities.
- Develop a weekend activities programme, including identifying community key-holders.
- Raise community fund to guarantee deposits to remove barriers to hiring.
- Continue engagement of young people with the junior BIG to develop weekend and holiday activities for young people.

Donnington Wood Lifelong Learning Centre:

- Potential extension of TCAT courses, especially evening classes
- Good example of a volunteer-run community cafe, with some volunteers going on to gain employment. Potential to work with a training partner (potentially TCAT) to develop the cafe as a food hygiene and catering training centre, and as a catering business.
- Look into potential for Sita grant funding.
- Engage St. Matthew's Church in discussions about the partnership management model.

Leegomery Community Centre:

- The WRVS had moved out of the centre creating an opportunity for a volunteer run cafe, possibly using the Donnington model.
- Engagement of the Parish Council.
- Support the development of a residents' group to engage local people in the development of the centre.
- The centre has a range of small office-type meeting rooms which could be leased to businesses serving the local community such as dentists and solicitors.
- Explore options for the use of the outside space which has previously been used for summer fetes and events.

Sutton Hill Community Centre:

- Development of a service level agreement for the community run cafe to increase volunteer and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Explore opportunities for sponsorship to update IT equipment to attract TCAT back to deliver courses at the centre and to develop the cafe as an internet cafe.
- Building on the good work with the parish Council, continue to seek private sector sponsorship from B&Q to complete the community tile mosaic project.
- To use the dance mats to offer dance sessions to attract and engage younger people with the centre.

Watling Centre Arleston:

- Potential development of outside land for allotments or a community garden.
- The new kitchen opens up the potential for a community cafe offering tea/coffee mornings and lunches for elderly residents, cookery classes and themed catering events.
- Build on the results of the 2010 survey which indicated a demand for activities for the young and the elderly.
- Need to work with Wellington Town Council.

General:

- Evaluating and applying lessons from the Brookside pilot
- Improve website marketing, consider on-line booking system and development of local marketing material with residents/young people.
- Use of volunteers and established user groups to act as key holders.

- Develop relationship with CVS to identify ways of working together to develop usage of community centres with the voluntary sector.
- Council service areas should consider the centres for hosting events and meetings or delivering services to improve awareness and uptake of activities and Council services. Members have recommended this with particular reference to leisure services, the voluntary Youth Offer and health/public health related activities.
- Consider pricing policy and tiered community / commercial rates.
- Consider feasibility of a “Community Board” for Council and non-Council centre managers to share good practice, work collaboratively, possibly a referral system if appropriate.
- The potential for community / volunteer projects to freshen-up tired decor, and bring outside space into community use.
- Consider opportunities for private sector investment and sponsorship similar to Cap Gemini in Dawley Town Hall e.g. direct investment (match funded by the Borough Town Development Fund), support and advice to the management group, work with Phoenix School to design a logo which involved the young people interviewing over 200 residents as part of a competition,
- Develop strategic relationship with designated point of contact for TCAT, and investigate interest of other training/education providers in using the centres to deliver courses.

6. EVIDENCE GATHERED

As part of the review the Committee visited the following community centres:

Council managed:

Brookside Community Centre
 Donnington Wood Lifelong Learning Centre
 Leegomery Community Centre
 Priorslee Community Centre
 Sutton Hill Community Centre
 Watling Centre Arleston

Non-Council:

Park Lane Centre
 Oak Tree Centre
 Little Wenlock Village Hall
 Hollinswood and Randlay Community Centres
 Admaston Community Centre

Members are indebted to the following people who met and provided information to the Committee:

Partners and local residents

Members of Brookside Improvement Group	
Sue Bates	Little Wenlock Residents Group
Katrina Baker	Hollinswood & Randlay Parish Council
Jane Bellingham	Park Lane Centre Manager
Jean Edwards	Park Lane Volunteer Group
Rose Gregory	Donnington Lifelong Learning Centre
Fleur Hemming Mount	Oaktree Centre Manager
Zoe Hill	Park Lane Volunteer Group
John Ironmonger	TCAT Manager for Community Education

Mick Lloyd
Sue Parsons
Barry Tillotson
Paul Wolfe

Council for Voluntary Service
Little Wenlock Residents Group
Admaston House Trust
Dawley Town Hall Regeneration

Cabinet Members

Cllr Arnold England
Cllr Shaun Davies

Leisure & Wellbeing
Co-operative Council & Neighbourhood Services

Officers

Richard Partington
Rachael Jones
Wendy Tonge
Sarah Durnall
Sharon Price
Jas Bedesha
Michelle Brockway
Stuart Davidson
Jo Revell
Rachael Threadgold

Managing Director
Community Engagement Equalities & Action Manager
Priority Action Team Manager
Community Facilities Team Leader
Community Facility Manager
Service Delivery Manager – Cohesion
Finance Team Leader
Leisure Service Delivery Manager
Health, Safety & Resilience Team
Sport and Physical Activity Development Manager

Lead Scrutiny Officer

Tracy Clarke

Report prepared by Tracy Clarke and Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Officers 01952 383114.

Appendix 1 - Community Centre Profile

Centre	Facilities	Opening Hours	Main hirers
Brookside Community Centre Age 40 years	Main Hall Training Room 2 small Rooms	Mon-Thurs: 9am - 8.30pm Friday: 9am - 5pm Sunday: 1pm - 3pm	TCAT Playgroup Tai Chi First Steps Why Weight NHS Fair Share
Donnington Lifelong Learning Centre Age 11years	Kitchen Classroom Coffee Bar Meeting Room x 2	Monday: 8am - 9pm Tuesday: 8am - 4.30pm Friday: 8am - 5pm	TCAT NHS Taxi Drivers
Leegomery Community Centre Community centre since 1980's Centre previously an old farmhouse possibly 200yrs old	Kitchen Coffee Bar Large Room - children's toilets, kitchen and storage Training Room Office spaces	Mon/Tue/Thurs/Fri: 9am - 5pm Wed: 9am - 9pm	Pre School CVS Slimming World I CAN 2 Art Club
Priorslee Community Centre Age 17 years	Main Hall Small storage room kitchen, (no office)	8.30am to 4pm	Pre School Weight Watchers
Sutton Hill Community Centre Age 43 years	Main Hall Smaller Hall Kitchen Coffee Bar Training Room	Mon: 9am - 8.30pm Tues: 9am - 8pm Wed: 9am - 9pm Thurs: 9am - 9.30pm Fri: 9am - 3.30pm	TCAT Brownies Rainbows Guides Aerobics ICAN2 Senior Group
Watling Centre Age 25 years	small room large room kitchen playground and field	Monday: 9am - 8pm Tues: 9am - 2pm and 4.45pm - 7.30pm Wed: 9am - 5.45pm Thurs: 9am - 7.15pm Fri: 9am - 6.15pm	TCAT Youth Club Girls Youth Club Arabic Teachings Tumble Tots Playscheme

Appendix 2 – Community Centre Financial Information

Outturn against budget for 2011/12

Site	2011/12 Budget £	Actual spent in 11/12 £	2011/12 Variance £
GENERAL (0000)	246,480	252,787	6,307
DONNINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE (DONN)	-6,300	-1,086	5,214
LEEGOMERY COMMUNITY CENTRE (LEEG)	7,070	4,968	-2,102
BROOKSIDE COMMUNITY CENTRE (BROO)	11,050	7,744	-3,306
SUTTON HILL COMMUNITY CENTRE (SUTT)	13,010	17,085	4,075
WATLING COMMUNITY CENTRE (WATL)	13,990	2,915	-11,075
PRIORSLEE COMMUNITY CENTRE (PRIO)	-180	-9,237	-9,057
WOODSIDE COMMUNITY CENTRE (WOOD)	10,610	10,600	-10
Overall Total	295,730	285,777	-9,953

This is mainly Staffing/Support Service costs which are not directly charged to a Community Centre

Income targets for 2011/12 and variance against targets at year end.

Site	Income	Total Income for 2011/12	2011/12 under/(over) Achievement on income budget
General	0	0	0
Donnington Community Centre	-28,250	-19,842	8,408
Leegomery Community Centre	-27,160	-25,713	1,447
Brookside Community Centre	-25,120	-24,679	441
Sutton Hill Community Centre	-17,350	-10,046	7,304
Watling Community Centre	-7,990	-9,975	-1,985
Priorslee Community Centre	-8,970	-12,241	-3,271
Woodside Community Centre	0	0	0
	-114,840	-102,496	12,344

Budget for 2012/13

Site	Employees	Premises	Transport	Supplies & Services	Capital Financing	Support Services	Income	Total 2012/13 Budget per site
General	79,600	0	7,950	300	0	223,030	0	310,880
Donnington Community Centre	0	0	0	3,560	0	0	-28,250	-24,690
Leegomery Community Centre	0	3,500	0	1,860	0	0	-27,160	-21,800
Brookside Community Centre	0	0	0	1,660	0	0	-25,120	-23,460
Sutton Hill Community Centre	0	3,500	0	2,150	0	0	-17,350	-11,700
Watling Community Centre	0	2,700	0	890	0	0	-7,990	-4,400
Priorslee Community Centre	2,000	0	0	830	0	0	-8,970	-6,140
Woodside Community Centre	0	0	0	10,610	0	0	0	10,610
	81,600	9,700	7,950	21,860	0	223,030	-114,840	229,300