

VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK (COMMUNITY CENTRES) TASK GROUP

26 MAY 2015

Present: Councillor R Martins (Chair)

Councillors K Collett, A Joynes, K Hastrick and B Mehta

Also present: Councillors J Connal, T Rogers and L Topping

Officers: Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services
Corporate, Leisure and Community Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (RC)

6 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There were no apologies for absence.

7 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest.

8 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2015 were submitted and signed.

9 FEEDBACK FROM WARD COUNCILLORS

Members noted the written feedback provided by Ward Councillors regarding their local community centres.

No further responses had been received since the publication of the agenda.

10 ACTIVITY SHEETS FROM COMMUNITY CENTRES

Members noted the activity sheets from the community centres detailing the activities available.

OFFICERS' REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services (Head of CSCS) and Corporate Leisure and Community Section Head (CLC Section Head) presented Members with recommendations for each of the centres.

The Head of CSCS informed Members that, following the Task Group meeting of 12th May 2015, officers had taken on board Members' comments which had helped officers to crystallise their thoughts regarding the community centres and had informed the structure of the recommendations. It was noted that the recommendations took into account that each centre was at a different stage of their journey towards becoming self-sustaining.

Councillor Connal spoke at the meeting regarding Holywell Community Centre. She informed Members that she had visited the centre and met with one of the user groups.

Councillor Connal provided officers and the Members of the Task Group with a report and a flyer produced by the centre providing information regarding the centre's activities, community events, private hire events and their business plan for 2015-16.

There was discussion around the centres providing robust business plans. Councillor Joynes queried how detailed the business plans were expected to be.

The Chair noted that all centres were different and not all of them had the expertise to produce a good business plan. He wanted to ensure that Cabinet had balanced and complete information to ensure an informed decision was made. Councillor Rogers suggested providing the centres with a template to work from however it was noted a common template would be impractical given the different centres had different needs. For example the Meriden Community Centre's business plan would need to focus on capital whereas the West Watford Community Association would need to focus on services. Furthermore, some of the centres were managed by organisations with the competence to produce business plans though officers did provide support and guidance to those that need it.

It was agreed that all the organisations managing community centres be required to submit a business plan by September 2015 detailing their vision and plans for future service delivery and sustainability beyond 2016.

The Chair stated that there were two questions which needed to be considered in determining whether community centres continued as a commissioning priority. First, whether the centre was needed and second, how the centre was managed. The Chair noted deprivation in the local area was one way in which need for a community centre could be established. It was noted that Meriden Community Centre was located in the area with the highest level deprivation in Watford, followed by Centrepont, Leavesden Green, Holywell, Orbital and WWCA.

The Head of CSCS noted that these community centres had been included in the Commissioning Framework in the past as they were located in recognised areas of deprivation.

Councillor Joynes believed the centres needed to define their roles and that marketing needed to be focused on getting users through the door. She noted it was a matter of both 'what you offer' and also 'how you offer it'.

Councillor Mehta stated the centres needed to meet the areas specific needs. She believed each centre was distinct and should be encouraged to flourish in its own individual way.

The Head of CSCS noted that some centres were already working with the Council's communications team to help market activities and officers would encourage others to do so.

Councillor Rogers questioned whether the Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB) could use the centres. Officers stated community centres were encouraged to foster relationships with outside organisations such as the CAB.

Members agreed and that the centres were well located and adequately placed to address deprivation related issues in their respective areas.

The Chair suggested setting specific service delivery criteria to which community centres should adhere; however it was noted by Members that such criteria should not be too onerous or constraining. Officers suggested setting key objectives to meet the needs of the community with particular reference to public health including mental health and well-being, support for employment and training, support for young people, support for elderly people, support in relation to finance and debt, and support for disabled people. Members wanted centres to support the identified needs of their individual communities and foster a sense of community spirit in the area.

Councillor Topping urged Members to avoid setting unrealistic targets for centres such as providing support for disabled people where the physical limitations of buildings did not allow wheelchair access.

It was suggested that centres would be able to focus on one or more of the objectives according to local need, their capacity to deliver and relevant demographic information.

Officers were requested to circulate the above recommendations electronically to Members for comments before they were presented at the Portfolio Holders meeting on 1st June.

Councillor Collett noted there was a wide spread of activities taking place at the centres however it appeared that the public were sometimes unaware of what was taking place at the centres. She believed more people would use the centres if they were aware of what was going on. Councillor Mehta agreed noting part of the solution would be connecting the different groups together.

Officers suggested Ward Councillors could help promote information about centre activities. Councillor Mehta highlighted the availability of free marketing tools such as social media websites. Councillor Collett was concerned that elderly residents would not use social media and that they were more likely to read leaflets. Councillor Connal noted that residents' associations notice boards were well placed to advertise information about community centres however it required better communication between the organisations.

There was debate between Members as to whether community centres were best placed to carry out their own marketing or whether the Council should take such activity in-house and require the Council's communications team to promote and market activities on the centres' behalf. It was also debated whether or not the communications team would require part of the budget earmarked for the centres to facilitate such work or whether they had capacity to do so within existing resources. The Head of CSCS agreed to speak with officers from the Council's communications team to ascertain what assistance they could provide community centres within existing resources.

Councillor Hastrick noted that some of the centres were run by organisations such as the Football Trust which had their own internal communications teams. She believed the Trust needed to be directed to advertise in the community.

Councillor Topping suggested the Council offered media training for the centres to encourage them to utilise different methods of marketing.

Councillor Hastrick expressed concern regarding Meriden Community Centre however she was happy with the recommendations officers had provided.

Councillor Rogers questioned whether inter-centre competitions could be organised however it was noted that many centres did not have the capacity to hold such events.

It was noted that funding would remain at the current level for the next three years, and that currently there were no requirements to make further savings from the voluntary sector budget.. There were no plans at this stage to increase funding however funding would be reviewed on an annual basis with consideration of any savings or growth bids. All decisions would require the approval of Cabinet.

Members considered the recommendations specific to each centre:

Holywell

Members agreed the Council should continue to fund the centre for three years to provide stability. Thus allowing for any opportunities that might arise from the Sports Facility Strategy to be considered and to enable Watford and Three River Trust to maximise income potential through hall hire for charitable fundraising events, business events and conferences, private hires including wedding

receptions, and health and wellbeing activities that target evidenced health issues in the local area.

Orbital

Members agreed the Council should continue to fund the centre for three years to provide stability. Thus enabling the YMCA to consider redevelopment and funding opportunities that would help them to become self-sustaining. There were also community development opportunities with the influx of new residents as a result of the new Watford Community Housing Trust housing development.

It was noted that the centre should also maximise engagement with the new community.

Councillor Collett also noted the Housing Trust should be required to advertise to the wider community and not just their residents.

Leavesden Green

Members agreed the Council should continue to fund the centre for two years up to April 2017, after which Watford Community Housing Trust would continue with their long lease (99 years) on the condition of using the building for community activities. This would be embedded in the lease as a Community Use Agreement.

Centrepont

Councillor Joynes noted Centrepont Community Centre needed to focus on what they were offering as there was so much competition in the centre of the town. It was noted the centre previously focused on youth as the previous organisation who managed the centre was First Rung who specialised in youth employability.

Councillor Mehta suggested that officers would need to identify the centre's 'unique selling proposition' (USP) and work towards connecting the centre with the transient community in the local area.

Members agreed with the recommendation that the Council should continue to manage the centre on an interim basis within a budget envelope of £69k whilst further discussions took place with regard to the future of the centre. Thus allowing the opportunity to consider any impacts from the Property Review and the outcomes from the Watford Community Housing Trust's Community Options Study. Officers would also explore partnership opportunities around the future management of the building.

Members also agreed that as Centrepont Community Centre was in a different position to the other community centres, there therefore needed to be a separate detailed review to consider the range of options outside of the current exercise. This could take place during the period of the Commissioning Framework review.

Meriden

Councillor Collett expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of development of Meriden Community Centre. She believed the Watford Football Sports and Education Trust needed to 'get in gear'.

Councillor Mehta believed the Council needed to support the Trust who had provided the required resources to secure funding. Councillor Collett noted that the development was going in the right direction.

The Head of CSCS noted that there was movement behind the scenes as the Trust had been working hard to secure funding. However they still need to find a further £170k to achieve the £1.4 million required for the redevelopment..

Members agreed the Council should continue to fund the centre for three years whilst redevelopment of the site is completed. The Watford Football Sports and Education Trust (WFC Trust) would be required to submit a comprehensive business plan with evidence of moving towards becoming self-sustaining from April 2019.

West Watford Community Association (WWCA)

Members agreed the Council should continue to fund the centre for three years whilst the WWCA explored opportunities for income generation and future alternative premises/partnerships.

Moving forward, it was noted that officers would electronically circulate the revised recommendations, the response of the communications team to assisting the marketing of the community centres and profiles of users where they were available. Officers hoped to present the recommendations to Cabinet in July 2015 with the final decision being made in September 2015. A brief update would also be made to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Chair

The Meeting started at 6.30pm
and finished at 7.35pm