

VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK (COMMUNITY CENTRES) TASK GROUP

12 May 2015

Present: Councillor Rabi Martins (Chair)
Councillor Karen Collett
Councillor Kareen Hastrick
Councillor Anne Joynes
Councillor Binita Mehta

Also Present: Councillor Seamus Williams

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

1. ELECTION OF A CHAIR/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Task Group was asked to elect a Chair for the Task Group.

It was noted that Councillor Kareen Hastrick had replaced Councillor Jeanette Aron on the Task Group.

AGREED

That Councillor Rabi Martins be elected Chair of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (Community Centres) Task Group.

2. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. SCOPE

Members noted the scoping document. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded Members that the Task Group was to look at specific community centres which were funded by the Council in relation to how they fitted into the Commissioning Framework, not all community centres in general.

4. SCRUTINY REPORT: VOLUNTARY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK (COMMUNITY CENTRES)

Members received a scrutiny task group report from the Head of CSCS and the CLC Section Head regarding the community centres in relation to the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework.

It was noted that the Council provided funding to a number of organisations including the Watford Palace Theatre, the Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB), Shopmobility, Watford & Three Rivers Trust and a number of local community centres.

The Head of CSCS provided background information on the journey community centres had undertaken which was detailed in the scrutiny task group report.

Members were asked to consider the future of each of the five centres. Additionally a sixth centre, West Watford Community Association, was incorporated into the community centre service priority during the last Commissioning Framework.

The Chair was of the opinion that there should be consensus when considering what issues needed to be addressed. The Head of CSCS noted that the focus was not cutting funding or disposing of centres but rather to consider how things were progressing with each of the centres and what was the best way forward. She highlighted that all the centres were different and though savings might be made through the process, the focus was on making the centres more independent.

The Chair asked officers about the timeframe of the work to be carried out. It was noted that further clarity was hoped to be achieved by June 2015 with the decision on how to proceed to be made by Cabinet in September 2015. The life span of the community centres was different for each centre as some had long property leases whereas the future of other centres was less certain. All the community centres were required to produce a business plan by September 2015.

The Task Group considered the different centres in turn:

Holywell

Members noted that Holywell Community Centre was managed by Watford and Three Rivers Trust. Although the centre was the first to be outsourced it had faced some challenges due to both the poor location of the building and the restructuring of the Trust. The centre did however have a large hall and car parking available which could be used more effectively

Officers highlighted that health and wellbeing might be an area of focus for W3RT as the evidence indicated a high percentage of childhood obesity for children between four and eleven, high standardised ratio for cancer incidence, and a high number of hospital stays for self-harm and alcohol harm and emergency admissions for hip fractures for over 65's in the local area. W3RT were a key contributor to the health and wellbeing agenda through their Hertfordshire County Council commissioned services.

It was also confirmed that the site was a strategic sports facility site within the Council's Sports Facility Strategy.

It was noted that Holywell was not in a position to be sustainable without continued Council funding support for the next three years to provide stability whilst opportunities were explored.

Councillor Karen Collett asked if SLM, who managed the Council's leisure centres, could provide health services. The Head of CSCS commented that SLM did not provide outreach services and that health provision was commissioned by HCC and local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's). Councillor Collett also noted that the hall and car park could be promoted for large events. Officers advised that the hall was already used for receptions and relationships were being developed with charities to use the location for fundraising events.

Councillor Anne Joynes highlighted problems relating to transport however these were noted as outside of the Borough's remit as they were dealt with by the County Council.

The Chair stated that it was not just money that the centre needed but continuing advice and guidance from the Council on effective running of the centre.

Orbital

The CLC Section Head advised Members that the centre was performing well due to the efforts of the centre manager with the backing of the YMCA. The centre was described as fit for purpose and very engaged with the community. The YMCA were looking at ways to be self-sustaining as well as development opportunities for the building. The Council would however need to continue to provide funding for three years to provide stability.

Councillor Collett highlighted the fact that the centre was working well with local churches. She also described the music gym as fantastic.

Councillor Binita Mehta noted that she had family in the local community and the facilities had changed little over that time. She believed the centre needed more space. Councillor Collett however believed that a great deal of improvement had been made in recent years.

Councillor Seamus Williams was of the opinion that the number of residents using the facilities had decreased over the years and many were not from the local area, for example outside organisations such as the judo club brought in users from outside the area. He also asked if the organisations collected data on where service users lived.

The CLC Section Head advised of the challenge of collecting data regarding users of community centres. Collection of such information was dependant on organisations who hired the room collecting information on behalf of the centre. It was noted that Orbital had provided robust information and that other centres could be contacted to forward data they had collected. Data received could be brought to the next task group meeting.

Members asked how the centres marketed and promoted their activities and requested information on activities currently undertaken at each of the centres to be brought to the next task group meeting.

Leavesden Green

Officers described the progress of Leavesden Green Community Centre as going according to plan. The centre had a 99 year lease granted on the condition that they redeveloped the centre. The centre had invested in a completely refurbished building. The centre had engaged with the community and a business plan had been created proposing a reduction in Council funding for 2015/16 and 2016/17, becoming self sustaining from April 2017.

The evidence indicated that the local area experienced issues of unemployment. The Head of CSCS commented on wider activities available to residents to address this through the wider work of Watford Community Housing Trust.

Centrepont

Members noted that the management of Centrepont had returned to the Council having previously been managed by First Rung who gave notice to terminate their lease in September 2014. There had been confusion regarding what activities the community centre had been running and that which had been privately run by First Rung. However, since the handback to the Council, activities at the centre were beginning to build up. These included coffee mornings and table tennis. However the centre was not yet in a position to be self-sustaining.

Officers informed Members that a community survey targeting local residents had been carried out to better understand the level of interest in attending activities at the centre, however responses had been disappointing. The majority of respondents had been existing users of the centre. It was noted that there were three potential options for the Centrepont Community Centre. These were:

- 1) Continuing to develop the centre to provide a range of community activities;
- 2) Continuing to develop the centre with a focus on providing health and wellbeing (the preferred option for respondents to the community survey), or;
- 3) Finding an alternative use for the site where the centre was located in line with the Property Review.

The Chair highlighted that activities at the centre have been seen to contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour in the area. He did not believe car parking was an issue for the centre but noted however that making room bookings was difficult in practice and although the centre provided good sized rooms they were not used to their full potential.

Councillor Williams felt that the evidence indicated a general growth of mental health related issues in the town and that the centres, including Centrepont, should engage with relevant charities and education providers who might be able to make use of facilities to provide support.

Meriden

Members noted that Meriden Community Centre was managed by Watford Football Club Trust. The Trust had a plan for redevelopment of the centre providing that they

could attract funding amounting to £1.4 million. This had taken longer than expected due to the complexity of securing funding from several sources.

There was also concern that the Trust would not achieve the full funding required. If this was the outcome, a revised plan would need to be drawn up. The position should be clear by the Cabinet meeting in September.

Members expressed hope that the recent success of Watford Football Club in being promoted to the Premiership, and the additional income that that generated for the club, would translate into further funding being made available to the centre. The major supermarket chains were also considered as possible sources of funding.

West Watford Community Association

West Watford Community Association was described as a thriving local centre and as busy and vibrant. The challenges the centre faced were limitations to the buildings. The management team was putting together a business plan and was investigating the potential use of the upstairs space to generate income.

The Council would continue to provide funding for three years to provide stability as the centre was not self-sustainable.

It was noted that the centre worked with a transient community and language issues were dealt with effectively. More could also be done to promote health and wellbeing.

Councillor Collett suggested engaging with local GPs to gather information on health needs in the area. The Head of CSCS cautioned that it was difficult to get a response from GPs many of whom were very busy dealing with the immediate health needs of their patients. Councillor Joynes highlighted the potential of communicating with other health workers such as midwives.

5. ACTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING

Members agreed the following actions:

AGREED

1. Officers to provide Members with information regarding the following for all centres by the next meeting:
 - a. The range of activities offered;
 - b. Information regarding marketing and promotion;
 - c. Profile of users (where possible).
 2. Officers to provide Members with details of the funding and information on planned activities provided through the Community Activation Fund which applied to Central Ward only and was administered by the Council's Sports Development Officer. This related to activities at Centrepont community centre only.
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3. Members to be provided with contact information for the centres and to make their own arrangements to visit or speak to community centre staff.
4. All members to be invited to attend the next meeting of the task group as observers.
5. Officers to provide Members with options and recommendations for discussion and consideration at the next meeting.
6. Officers to liaise with community centre management teams regarding the potential opportunities for working with groups for example mental health charities and education providers.

The meeting started at 7.30 p.m.
and finished 9.10 p.m.

Chair
Community Safety Partnership Task Group