

Meeting of the Cabinet - 22nd September 2010

Report of the Director of Adult Community and Housing Services .

Shaping Community Centres for the Future

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval for engagement with Community Centres through their relevant Community Associations and Management Committees to review and shape Community Centres in Dudley for the future.

Background

2. Responsibility for the management of Community Centres was transferred to the Directorate of Adult, Community and Housing Services (DACHS) in 2008. Since then, progress has been made on a number of aspects of work such as:
 - the collation and up-dating of management information about the Centres e.g. management / governance capacity; levels of use; or health and safety, amongst other issues;
 - working with the community and voluntary sector to bring about specific improvements in Community Centres e.g. decoration or repair work; support with Community Centre governance issues; or assisting to bring in new activities;
 - co-operation with other Council services and partners on related Community Centre issues including support to the transformation of:
 - Library services through co-location of a Library Link;
 - Learning Disability services through the introduction of new activities in Community Centres for people with learning disability;
 - Mental health services through provision of Access to Psychological Therapies in Community Centres in association with NHS Dudley;
 - Older People's care services through promoting the well-being and independence of older people using the Centres.
3. Some Community Centres are flourishing. They very actively promote the well-being of their local community. Some Centres need more support. In this context, there is a need for further engagement with the Community

Centres and others with an interest in their development, to shape the next steps in the light of a number of issues. These issues include:

- Management capacity / governance— recruitment and retention of volunteers for Community Centre Management Committee acting as Trustees for Community Centres and ensuring good governance can be difficult. Elected Members of the Council often act as ‘champions’ for their local Centres, including volunteering for the Community Centre Committee as Trustees.
- Use of Community Centres – it can be challenging to maximise use of the Community Centres for many reasons such as the presence of other community venues in a locality or a lack of volunteers to promote the use of the Centre in the locality.
- Financial aspects – where activity in a Community Centre is low, then it does not attract income for its use. This can affect the overall financial position of a Community Centre.
- Health and Safety - most Community Centres require considerable support to understand and comply with health and safety responsibilities.
- Leases – there is some difference in lease arrangements. A large majority of Community centres lease their properties from the Council. Four have land-only leases and the Council is a Tenant at one Centre.
- State of repair - prioritising repairs for which the Council is responsible is a challenge in the midst of resource commitments for the Council as a whole. It is estimated that the cost of bringing the Community Centres up to a given standard including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act would cost in the region of £2.6 million.
- Location - the location of Community Centres across the Borough by Area Committee varies across the areas - see Appendices 1 and 2. There are Ten in Brierley Hill; Five in Stourbridge; four in Halesowen; Five in North Dudley; and six in central Dudley. In addition, other community venues are also located across the Borough. These include buildings of other public sector organisations and voluntary, community and faith sector buildings including scout-huts, sports clubs, or pensioners clubs. In addition, there are a range of community venues managed for Council service delivery e.g. children’s and youth centres, libraries and neighbourhood learning centres. The Dudley Community Partnership is undertaking a review of this wider picture of assets in the Borough.
- Changing policy context – there is renewed emphasis on the importance of communities, localism, sharing assets and greater use of the community and voluntary sector to meet wider policy objectives such as greater personalisation of adult social care services or increasing skills and access to employment. In addition, other policy developments such as the “asset transfer” policy (i.e. granting leases in return for the value of activity undertaken in the Centres) is also available for use.

4. The changing policy context and the other issues identified suggest a need to re-vitalise the vision for Community Centres as *“A network of local community hubs and resources meeting the needs and aspirations of local communities.”* This vision for Community Centres will be achieved by applying principles to shape Community Centres in the Borough as a whole for the future as follows:

- Increasing the extent and pattern of activity in Community Centres, meeting the needs and aspirations of local communities and developing policies
 - Supporting communities to take responsibility in developing, shaping and deepening pride and bringing them together in their localities
 - Making best use of Community Centres as local buildings including co-location, shared use and partnership with other local provision to enable people to come together
 - Improving management capacity and governance overall
 - Ensuring financial viability, value for money, efficiency and promoting access to external funding resources
 - Raising awareness and improving practice in health and safety.
 - Developing leasehold management arrangements.
 - Working to address the state of repair of individual buildings making most effective use of resources overall
 - Strengthening local community and civic renewal activity through needs-led analysis of the Community Centres in their local and Borough-wide context
5. Given the different situation of individual Community Centre in the Borough, there may be a range of options for each of them. Development of some Centres might be advanced through the use of an “asset transfer” model. Other Centres will be strengthened through the existing leasehold negotiation process. Where viability is an issue because of a combination of any of the factors identified above in para. 3, then co-location with other local facilities might be the best solution. It is recognized that there may be further options. Those mentioned are merely indicative of possible outcomes following engagement with the Community Centres and relevant others. A further report will be made to the Cabinet based on the outcome of engagement to agree next steps in shaping Community Centres for the future.
6. Engaging with Community Centres in this way also gives an opportunity to look more widely to other relevant Council-owned local facilities and assets which serve communities in similar ways. For example, there is some provision for older people in buildings owned by the Council that are not highlighted amongst the named Community Centres in the Appendices to this Report. This process will enable an up-dated understanding of the very wide range of community centres and associations provision and activities in the Borough which can be brought into the outcome of the review as relevant.

Finance

7. The total Community Centres revenue budget is £288,250. As indicated in para. 3, it is estimated that the cost of bringing the Community Centres up to a given standard including compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act would cost in the region of £2.6 million in the context of the Council’s overall capital asset management programme.

Law

8. Section 4 of the Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to establish a local strategic partnership to address collaborative working and develop a community strategy. Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 enables the Council to do anything which is likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of the economic, social and environmental well being of the area.

Equality Impact

9. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of this activity to assess the impact of recommendations in a future Cabinet Report. The Mission Statement of the Community Renewal Strategy is to ensure that *“No one is disadvantaged by who they are or where they live”* and the proposed engagement ensures that communities themselves with their representatives are involved in decision-making. Where children and young people are involved, they are directly consulted and frequently design the response to local issues as has been done at a number of Community Centres.

Recommendation

10. That the Cabinet:
 - approve engagement with Community Centres as listed in Appendix 1 through their relevant community associations and management committees together with any other parties involved;
 - commission a review of related community centre provision in the Borough including a specific focus on facilities for older people;
 - accept a further report based on the engagement and review activity on the future shape, pattern and use of Community Centres in the Borough.



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APPENDIX 1

COMMUNITY CENTRES IN DUDLEY BY AREA COMMITTEE AREA

Area Committee	Community Centres
Brierley Hill (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brockmoor• Dingle• Nine Locks• Oakfield/Hawbush• Pensnett• Richardson Hall• Wordsley• Wall Heath• Kingswinford• Fenspool
Halesowen (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lutley• Yemeni• Cradley• Netherend
Stourbridge (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lye• Lye Community Gym• Norton• Wollescote• Withymoor
North Dudley (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sedgley• Coseley Son's of Rest• Hurst Hill• Upper Gornal• Rainbow
Central Dudley (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lodge Farm• Priory• Quarry Bank• Woodside• Sledmere• Wrens Nest