

**SRP 2 - "COMMUNITY CENTRES"**

**MINUTES**

**Thursday, 24th September 2015.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Natasha Ahmed-Shaikh (Chair), Jon Ball, Paul Conlan (substitute for Gareth Shaw), Fabio Conti, Daniel Crawford (substitute for Kamaljit Dhindsa), Penny Jones (substitute for Ciaran McCartan), Anthony Kelly (substitute for Chris Summers), Dee Martin (substitute for Aysha Raza), Mohinder Midha, Joy Morrissey (Vice-Chair), and Simon Woodroofe.

**Also Present:**

Michael Carr - Democratic Services Officer, Ealing BC  
Martin Crank - Resident Involvement Manager, Ealing BC  
Jonathan Kirby - Assistant Director, Major Projects  
Laurie Lyle - Democratic Services Officer, Ealing BC  
Anna-Marie Rattray - Scrutiny Review Officer  
Steve Flynn, Director, Acton Community Forum.

**1. Apologies for Absence**  
(Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors; Kamaljit Dhindsa, Ciaran McCartan, Aysha Raza, Gareth Shaw and Chris Summers.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Ranjit Dheer, Cabinet Member for Safety, Culture and Community Services.

**2. Urgent Matters**  
(Agenda Item 2)

There were none.

**3. Matters to be Considered in Private**  
(Agenda Item 3)

There were none.

**4. Declarations of Interest**  
(Agenda Item 4)

Councillor Crawford made a personal declaration of interest in respect of Item 7, as he is an Acton councillor.

**5. Minutes**  
(Agenda Item 5)

The Panel considered the minutes of the previous meeting held 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Panel held on 7th July, 2015, be agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments;

- (i) Councillor Steed substituted for Councillor Ball;
- (ii) Minute No. 5, page 6, paragraph 2, first sentence; delete the word "is" and insert the words "cannot be".

The first sentence of paragraph 2, page 6, should read:

*"He said that the Community Centre **cannot be** staffed by untrained volunteers and it was proving increasingly difficult to provide meaningful services."*

## 6. Community Centre Consultation Update (Agenda Item 6)

The Panel gave consideration to a report and presentation by Jonathan Kirby, Assistant Director, Major Projects, which provided an update on the actions from the previous Panel meeting and progress on the consultation being carried out by Environment and Customer Services with the community association run community centres.

General updates included:

- there had been two requests for voluntary redundancy,
- budget reductions were to take effect as from October 2015,
- a further saving of £114k pa for two years starting in November 2015 had been budgeted, and
- there was ongoing consultation with community partners to identify the further savings required.
- Formal land valuations were taking place to value property assets on community sites. This would confirm previous indications of what market rates would be.
- Sustainability grants were available from the Council's Energy Team and the Council's Energy Tariff could also offer some savings to community organisations that apply and can meet the criteria. The Council would be working with community organisations to help them meet the criteria.
- A capital request had been submitted and the Panel would be updated in November on that. The outcome for the capital funding request should be available by November 2015.
- Ealing Music Service had made the decision to move to Greenford Community Centre.
- A number of community organisations had expressed interest in hosting visits from the Panel.

Jonathan Kirby said that he would update the Panel as and when possible on staff consultations being carried out.

The Panel asked if the Council knew how many community associations had charitable status and if Jonathan Kirby was confident that everyone was aware of what that would mean for their organisation. He responded that a number of sites already had a form of charitable status. Northolt Village was working towards it and had completed the first stage of the process. Members were informed that Winckworth Sherwood would offer advice on the implications of charitable status and community associations could also take their own legal advice. The Panel asked if advice was available on changes to VAT as a result of changes in an organisations status, Jonathan Kirby said that Winckworth Sherwood would also be able to offer advice on this.

Members asked what governance arrangements those community associations without charitable status had. Jonathan Kirby responded that a couple of organisations were not yet formally incorporated with charitable status, but were registered for various different purposes by the individuals working within the organisations and did not, therefore, have limited liability (limited by guarantee) status. For example, sometimes people had their name on a lease for a premises being used by a community organisation, on behalf of the organisation.

Clarification was sought on why some community organisations were able to benefit from business rates relief whereas others were not. The Assistant Director replied that the Council was obtaining information site by site on each organisation, as there were different arrangements for different organisations; receiving different rates of relief, but that full information was not yet available. It was clarified that all organisations have to apply for rates relief and that it was not automatic upon achieving charitable status.

The Panel requested that a detailed review of the business rates position of each of the Community Associations be provided for the panel's next meeting in November.

Jonathan Kirby explained that the Council maintained information on the community associations, including information of assets and reserves. Some community associations were more at risk financially whereas others held substantial reserves. The Council had to retain a record of land values and therefore was carrying out a market rents assessment across its estates.

The Panel asked what discussion had taken place with individual organisations on fees and charges. Jonathan Kirby replied that managers had considered fees and charges and where there might be scope to adjust these, but these were mainly under the control of external organisations, e.g. prescribed under the terms of a lease or agreement.

Members asked what impact the reduction in staff support from 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015 would have on the community centres and if this reduction would affect all of them equally.

Jonathan Kirby replied that the service had indicated in the consultation document what the staff reduction would be. There would be a reduction of 35 hours of management support. The service was considering how best the impact of this should be distributed and would be letting organisations know on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015. There would be around 20% reduction in the budget.

Regarding the desire to make all community association run community centres entirely self-supporting, members asked what the Council was doing to help achieve this and what discussions were taking place. It was posited that it did not seem likely that this would be feasible and sustainable for all the community associations, as some did not have the resources.

Jonathan Kirby responded that the Council was working very hard to assist the community associations to explore options for alternative funding, e.g. fundraising applications for specific projects. Some associations did have more resources than others and there was a need to consider each association's situation and options as they were different and there were very different operational models and approaches across the sites. The service continued to advise as much as it could.

A member of the Panel commented that what community centres such as Perivale did for the elderly was indispensable and suggested that the Panel organise a site visit to the Perivale site to find out about their programme for the elderly. It was commented that Northolt Village community centre also did a lot for community programmes, including public health awareness.

The Panel asked if there had been any work on finding out if funding could be sourced through individuals care plans and were informed that this had not been specifically considered but that it was something that could be considered during the consultation process.

The panel asked if options were being explored for the redevelopment of any sites that were not viable Jonathan Kirby responded that this was not something that was being explored, the Council was trying to retain the current centres as far as possible. It was suggested that in the future it might be necessary to consider a broader set of options, but it was confirmed that there were no plans for redevelopment at present.

**Resolved:**

- (i) that the Panel note the report by the Assistant Director, Major Projects, which provided an update on the provision of community centres in the borough run by Environment and Customer Services;
- (ii) that the Panel agrees to receive a further report on community centres at its next meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

**7. Community Centres on Housing Estates**

The Panel gave consideration to a report and presentation by the Council's, Resident Involvement Manager, Martin Crank, which provided an update on the community centres located on Housing Estates, some of which were managed by Housing and Regeneration and others which were self-managed.

The Panel was also addressed by Steve Flynn, Director, Acton Community Forum, who informed Members of the Forum's work in developing community capacity and the Forum's management of the Oaktree Community Centre which the Panel noted had made it the cornerstone of the South Acton community for over eight years.

The Panel heard that, historically, the funding arrangements for community centres on estates were made through a small contribution from tenants' rents. This arrangement ended in the 1990s, when a pot of money was set aside to fund residents associations. There were twelve community centres based on housing estates, nine were managed by Ealing Council and three were managed by voluntary community groups.

The Panel heard that the community centres that were managed by community groups tended to be more successful than those managed by the Council directly.

The Oaktree Community Centre, which opened in 2007, was the first of Ealing's community centres to be managed by a community group, Acton Community Forum. The Forum was also renowned as a builder of capacity with an ability to make things happen. The centre was located in the heart of South Acton and used widely by the local community for various functions, contributing to community cohesion in South Acton.

Total usage for the last financial year was 1343 people.

The centre was managed by members of the community and by local community organisations. It produced a weekly newsletter and lots of events took place there regularly, including Sure Start activities in the family wing of the centre.

A panel member suggested that the Oak Tree Community Centre could be cited as best practice in the scrutiny report. She said that she received their newsletter regularly and that the approach they have taken was to actively engage with the local community.

The Panel asked how the Oak Tree Community Centre would be affected by the planned regeneration of the housing estate. The Panel was informed that the development plans for Phase 6 of the South Acton Regeneration included a 'community hub' which was due to be the new home for the Oaktree Community Centre, however recent communications with L&Q Housing Trust who manage this part of the estate, suggest that L&Q are looking to take over the management of the community hub, rather than it being under community ownership managed by Acton Community Forum as had previously been assured.

In response to questions about what was being done to raise awareness of the facilities on offer at community centres on Council estates, Martin Crank said that all of the council estate community centres were advertised on the internet. Most were already at 80 percent capacity, but that more work could be done to maximise the use of community centres by local residents.

The Panel asked if all the housing estate based community centres in Ealing should be managed by the local community. Martin Crank responded that the model that works well in South Acton was the preferred model. He said that management by a community group through a management agreement works best.

Martin Crank was asked how much involvement the Council actually had in managing the community centres run by voluntary groups.

He responded that it was very little; there was a periodic meeting between the Council and the community centre management on finance and if a major repairs issue arose, as the Council was responsible for this as the owner of the property.

The Panel asked what the situation was where the Council managed community centres directly. Smiths Farm was given as an example. It was responded that there were a mixture of different sites and facilities with different situations. Some buildings and facilities had a relatively shorter lifespan left. Martin Crank said that Smith Farm was a good example of where local residents had taken more control.

Some centres had not received as much investment in recent years and had drawn less income as they had been less desirable venues.

The Panel asked how the wider community might know about community centres and was informed that in recent years there had been a drive to increase use of community centres and this has included contacting every resident in the Borough.

The Panel asked how the Council could know if a community centre was responding to the needs of the local community. Martin Crank responded that the local residents association would usually let the Council know if they needed anything. There were 40 residents associations in the Borough.

The Panel asked how typical it was for council estates to have community facilities in-built into an estate. It was responded that new developments had moved away from "stand alone" facilities unless prescribed in their development plans, and that multi-use facilities were becoming more common in newer developments.

The Panel suggested that the Acton Community Forum work at the Oaktree Community Centre could be used as model for informing best practice in the management of other community centres and that other community centre managers might be able to benefit from learning from Mr Flynn's team, who could also possibly act as a mentor to other community centre managers. It was agreed to note this as a possible recommendation from the Panel.

Members also agreed that the Panel should undertake a site visit to Acton Community Forum in the near future and that if feasible, the next meeting of the Panel should be organised to take place at a community centre venue.

**Resolved:**

- (i) That the Panel note the report by the Council's, Resident Involvement Manager, which provided an update on the provision of community centres currently located on the borough's housing estates;
- (ii) That the Panel agrees to place on record its acknowledgement and appreciation of the considerable passion, effort and commitment exhibited by Steve Flynn and other members of the Oaktree Community Centre staff in developing community capacity, and their management of the 'Oaktree Community Centre.'
- (iii) That officers consider using the example provided by the Acton Community Forum in their management of the Oaktree Community Centre, as a model for informing best practice in the management of other community centres in the borough, and that officers seek to inform other community centre managers who may be able to benefit from the experiences gleaned from Mr Flynn's team;

- (iv) That the Panel agree to undertake a site visit to Acton Community Forum in the near future, and that if feasible, the next meeting of the Panel be organised to take place at the 'Oaktree Community Centre;'
- (v) That all the borough's community centre management committees be informed of the date and venue of future meetings of the Panel, including the next meeting;

## 8. Panel Work Programme

The next scheduled meeting of the Panel was programmed with the following items on its provisional agenda:

- Community facilities provided in schools
- Community facilities provided by Hall Hire
- Results of the Consultation with Community Associations.

The Panel members were invited to make suggestions for the work programme or any visits that they would like to carry out.

It was suggested that a tour of Perivale Community Centre with the Council's Adult Social Care service and to invite Ealing CCG, to see the facilities at Perivale, and to explore the possibility of the Council sharing cost burdens with Ealing CCG.

Further to a query raised at the beginning of the meeting, it was agreed that all community centres management committees should be informed of the date and venue of future meetings of the Panel, including the next meeting.

### Resolved:

- (i) That the Panel notes the outline work programme for 2015/2016, set out in the appendix to the report,
- (ii) That the Panel note that the items of business for consideration at the next meeting, are likely to include the following:
  - Community facilities currently provided in schools,
  - Council Halls for hire,
  - Outcome of the results of consultation undertaken with the Borough's Community Associations, and the proposed next steps,
  - Panel Work Programme, and
- (iii) That, if possible, the next meeting of the Panel take place at the 'Oaktree Community Centre'.

## 9. Date of Next Meeting

(Agenda Item 6)

It was noted that the next scheduled meeting of Scrutiny Review Panel 2, was Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.

Councillor Natasha Ahmed-Shaikh, Chair.

The meeting ended at 8.55pm

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