

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Task and Finish Group was to support the development of policy in relation to: -

- the provision of premises for community use, and
- the role of Northampton Borough Council in such provision
- monitoring any budget proposals in relation to community centres

The Council embarked upon a Review of the Management of its Community Centres and it was agreed that Overview and Scrutiny could assist this piece of policy development work by undertaking research and providing assistance and recommendations to support the Review. The Review commenced in August 2009 as an Appreciative Inquiry and converted to a Task and Finish Group in December 2009 with available resources, to conduct this in-depth piece of work.

A Councillor Task and Finish Group was established comprising Councillor Portia Wilson (Chair); Councillors Tony Clarke, Keith Davies, David Palethorpe and Tess Scott.

The Task and Finish Group agreed that the following needed to be investigated and linked to the realisation of the Council's corporate priorities:

- List of all premises currently available (or potentially available) for community use, including Northampton Borough Council's Community Centres, Community Rooms, School Facilities, premises owned and/or run by community organisations and faith groups.
- For the above, location, ownership, patterns of use, charging regime, accessibility, condition and similar
- Costs and income for Community Centres
- Current Northampton Borough Council's Policy, whether explicit or implicit
- Examples of good practice adopted elsewhere

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY FINDINGS

A significant amount of evidence was heard, details of which are contained in the report. After gathering evidence the Task and Finish Group established that: -

- 5.1 After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn:
 - 5.1.1 The Task and Finish Group realises that there needs to be accessibility to community facilities for all Groups.
 - 5.1.2 Community Centres need to look like a Community Centre first and foremost and hirers should return it to that state when their session concludes.
 - 5.1.3 The Task and Finish Group highlights the need for a stated percentage of the

usage of Community Centres and the number of Groups hiring the Centre to be documented. It would be advantageous for a monitoring system to be introduced. Other performance related monitoring could be tailored on a case-by-case basis.

- 5.1.4 The Task and Finish Group emphasises that 'one size does not fit all' and that each Community Centre needs to be looked at differently. When looking at any proposal for Community Centres, there is a need for clear Equal Opportunity Policies to ensure it is open to all. The Community Centre needs to be clearly signposted and look like a Community Centre. The responsibility and ownership of the building, together with booking details, should be clearly displayed on the outside of the Community Centre.
- 5.1.5 The Task and Finish Group has no objections to a specific Group, for example a Faith Group, taking on the management of a Community Centre but access has to be open to all and it has to be clearly labelled a Community Centre and not the Faith Group's Centre.
- 5.1.6 If there is a dominant use of a Community Centre, it can change the perception to the rest of the Community of what the Centre is. Some Centres are known as 'the nursery' or 'play group'. The same could happen if a specific Group managed a Community Centre.
- 5.1.7 The Task and Finish Group acknowledges the need for a clear Policy detailing specific categories for commercial and subsidised hire charges. Categories should comprise local Third Sector Groups, Third Sector Groups and Commercial Groups.
- 5.1.8 The Task and Finish Group noted that one particular Community Centre is unique in the way that it pays for its own Coordinator.
- 5.1.9 The current fees and charges for Northampton Borough Council managed Community Centres do not appear to be competitive. It is further realised, however, that there are occasions when the Council needs to subsidise some Groups, such as those known to be of low income.
- 5.1.10 The Task and Finish Group felt that all commercial businesses should pay commercial rates for the hire of Community Centres.
- 5.1.11 The Task and Finish Group highlights that there is a huge difference in hire rates between Community Centres.
- 5.1.12 The Task and Finish Group notes that the majority of Pre-School groups are being charged the community group rate for the hire of Community Centres and conveys its concerns about this charging regime. It has particular concerns, as often Pre-School groups appear to use Community Centres for their exclusion.
- 5.1.13 The Task and Finish Group has particular concerns regarding the minimal usage at one Community Centre. Due to the fact that a pre-school uses this Community Centre during school hours it cannot be used after 3pm because the Pre School leaves its kit in the Room. The Task and Finish Group felt that this Community Centre is a vital link with the community and it would be advantageous to ascertain whether the room is available for bookings after 3pm. It is further

acknowledged that Community Centre is set out as a school.

- 5.1.14 On its tour of the Community Centres, the Task and Finish Group was provided with examples that some bookings had been turned away. The Community often sees the Community Centre Coordinator as the contact for bookings but the Task and Finish Group realises that it is not within their' job description to take bookings. The need for the clear display of contact and booking arrangements was noted.
- 5.1.15 The Task and Finish Group recognises the need for Centre Coordinators to have ownership of a Community Centre or a clusters of Community Centres.
- 5.1.16 It is noted that arrangements for providing cover for some Community Centre Co-Ordinators is not consistent. The Task and Finish Group felt that weekends in particular are income-generating and that there is a need for cover to be provided. Community Centres should be available for seven days a week usage.
- 5.1.17 It was queried why some public bodies were using venues such as Sixfields and Franklins Gardens for their meetings but not utilising Community Centres. Community Centres are not marketed and there is a strong need for this. Often the image of Community Centres is 'run down' not the ideal place to hold a meeting. The Task and Finish Group appreciates that there are no available resources to market Community Centres. There may be potential for considering the role of Centre Managers.
- 5.1.18 It is realised that it is not just about acquiring bookings but also about how the Community Centre plays a role in the community, for example how the Community Centre supports the community. The Task and Finish Group concludes that at present, the Council 's role in the management of Community Centres appears to be as a caretaker only.
- 5.1.19 There is a need to explore the arrangements that the Council has with Management Committees to ascertain whether they require amendment and updating. It is apparent that many of the Legal Agreements are often decades old, most of which have expired.
- 5.1.20 On the tour of the Community Centres the Task and Finish Group was pleased to note that in the main the standard was high but it is felt that there is a lack of a maintenance schedule, such as. painting of window frames. A number of the Community Centres were built a number of years ago and the Task and Finish Group felt that if there were more modern buildings, they would be easier to let and cheaper to run.
- 5.1.21 The Task and Finish Group acknowledges the Council has recently approved a Corporate Asset Management Strategy, which recognises the benefits, which can accrue from Community Asset Transfers and is addressing the need for a policy to document its approach to such transfers. It emphasises the need for the Council to give support to organisations and Groups, such as help with business planning. Awaiting confirmation about this Review
- 5.1.22 It emphasises the need for the Council to give support to organisations and Groups, such as help with business planning.

- 5.1.23 From the evidence provided, the Task and Finish Group notes the comments that there is a need for more youth groups and youth activities. It is highlighted that Northampton Borough Council has nine community centres, only three of which host youth provision.
- 5.1.24 The Task and Finish Group agrees that the Equality Impact Assessment for Community Centres is very comprehensive and the majority of areas are covered. There is a need to ensure that all buildings that the Council has direct or indirect input into have a clear Equality Standards Policy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above overall findings have formed the basis for the following recommendations. The Task and Finish Group therefore recommends to Cabinet that: -

- 6.1.1 All leases for self managed Community Centres are reviewed to ensure that they meet consistent standards; based on a common core document. Leases be on a term of at least 25 years. .
- 6.1.2 In assessing the business cases, Management Committees must be able to demonstrate they are maintaining a local focus and provide evidence to support it can manage a number of Community Centres fitting the set criteria.
- 6.1.3 Northampton Borough Council provides information, such as building surveys, details of running costs to Self Managed Community Centres to aid business planning.
- 6.1.4 Management Committees are charged with ensuring that Community Centres are kept in a good state of repair. Northampton Borough Council provides an allocated sum of money to the Management Committees for general maintenance and repair of the Community Centres. Northampton Borough Council remains the budget holder for major repairs.
- 6.1.5 Suitable Community Groups are given the opportunity to submit an application for the management of a Community Centre(s). Existing Management Committees are given first opportunity to submit proposals for community centre(s) that they currently manage.
- 6.1.6 Where appropriate, Community Groups taking on the management role of the Community Centres, the Council or other partners provide a grant towards running costs, with the proviso that the Groups work in partnership with the Council to achieve community outcomes.
- 6.1.7 Northampton Borough Council works with Community Groups that take on the management of a Community Centre regarding the employment of a Centre Coordinator and/or Centre Manager.

- 6.1.8 The Council works with Management Committees to ensure that the Community Centres meet the needs of the Community.
- 6.1.9 A Policy, containing particular components such as an Equality Impact Assessment, Health and Safety issues, Terms of Access, booking and contact details to be clearly visible from the outside of the building, details of the condition in which the Community Centre should be left when the hirer has concluded its session, be introduced and issued to all Community Centres. The Policy is renewed on an annual basis.
- 6.1.10 Monitoring of the management of Community Centres is introduced, using management tools.
- 6.1.11 Cabinet considers, within appropriate resources, a method of promoting and marketing Community Centres.
- 6.1.12 The Task and Finish Group supports the development of a Community Asset Transfer Policy.
- 6.1.13 Centre Coordinators are responsible for a particular Community Centre/clusters of Community Centres to encourage ownership.
- 6.1.14 Community Centres are available for hire seven days a week.
- 6.1.15 A review of the fees and charges for Northampton Borough Council managed Community Centres is undertaken.
- 6.1.16 New builds for Community Centres achieve the same standard, or better, of the design of the floor space, accessibility and layout of Parklands and Pastures Community Centres.