

Norwich City Council
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Item 6

REPORT for meeting to be held on **Task and Finish Group – Community Space**

Purpose

This report covers the findings and recommendations of the scrutiny task and finish group – community space. The task and finish group was set up by the scrutiny committee in December 2011 to look at the distribution, social benefit and the council's role in the provision of community space, and to assist in the drawing up of assessment criteria. The first meeting took place in February 2012.

Conclusion

With the conclusion of the review the members of the task & finish group now wish to present the scrutiny committee with the report which outlines seven broad suggestions and recommendation areas;

- Networking and collaboration
- Accountability and management
- Training and mentoring
- The council's role
- Strategic development
- Environmental audit
- Communication

These are outlined in more detail on pages 12 to 15 of this report

Recommendation

Scrutiny committee is requested to:

1. Consider and comment on the report
2. Agree recommendations that should be reported to cabinet.

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- 1 Introduction from the task & finish group members** (pages 1 – 3)
- 2 Background and participants** (pages 4 – 5)
- 3 Methodology** (page 6)
- 4 Community space in Norwich (policy context)** (pages 6 – 8)
- 5 Observations and findings** (pages 8 – 12)
- 6 Recommendations** (pages 12 – 15)
- 7 Appendices and background papers**
 - a) Norwich city council community centres – current arrangements - Copy available
 - b) Additional community facilities (Oak Grove Chapel and the Phoenix Centre) - Copy available
 - c) Repair and maintenance of community centres - Note from property services manager
 - d) Community centres in Norwich – asset review 2011 - Copy available
 - e) Sample constitution of a Community Association (as an example) Sample license
Sample roles and responsibilities – Copies available
 - f) Asset management plan condition survey report for Jubilee Community Centre (as an example) - Copy available
 - g) Community centre regular activities at January 2012 - Snap shot available
 - h) Letters and questionnaires sent to community centres - Available
 - i) Questionnaire responses - Available
 - j) Report on Task & Finish group visits to community spaces (Phoenix Centre – Mile Cross, Clover Hill – Bowthorpe, Belvedere Centre – Nelson, Oak Grove Chapel – Catton Grove and Jubilee Centre – Harford (Appendix 1)
 - k) Public survey by councillors of attitudes to community centre provision - Available
 - l) Terms of reference and scoping document
 - m) Scrutiny committee task and finish group review of community space SWOT analysis (Appendix 2)
 - n) An informal survey of residents (Appendix 3)

The following reports made by other local authorities were also looked at as part of the task & finish groups work;

Crawley, Islington, Oldham, Newham and Saint Edmundsbury

- 1 Introduction from the task & finish group members**

- 1.1 As a group we met over a period of 12 months, visited 6 centres, and reviewed information from centre volunteers. There are 15 council owned community centres in Norwich, serving communities with over 40 different types of activity. The first centre was built in the 1950's and the last in the 1980's.
- 1.2 The buildings are varied and range from a single hall, to multiple rooms with IT suites and some have adjacent sports facilities such as cycle speedway tracks and bowling greens within council open spaces though are not part of the community centre.

There are also a wide range of other community spaces which are available for community use that are owned and run by other organisations. This includes church halls, rooms in schools and voluntary sector facilities.
- 1.3 Out of the wide diversity that the members visited, some centres were struggling with low numbers of volunteers, some thriving – but all said council support was essential.
- 1.4 Centres have an important role to play in people's lives particularly in these harsh economic times, providing a venue for affordable local activities which help social and physical health and well being, as well as providing equality of opportunity and a positive face for the council in the community.
- 1.5 The Council has a long history of community working and needs to consider its role to develop the resilience of council owned centres' and support to other facilities for the future. In line with its operating blueprint, the Council should also ensure that community centres have a clear role and purpose for supporting the delivery of its objectives.
- 1.6 We have aimed to reflect what we heard and observed from the centres, thank them for their participation and trust that our conclusions match their rightly high aspirations.
- 1.7 We congratulate the many volunteers we spoke to and have heard about during this review and celebrate the many volunteer hours that are provided to run the centres and provide a local facility.
- 1.8 From what we saw, with the implementation of our recommendations, there is every reason to expect a healthy and productive future for these exciting local venues if sufficient financial investment can be identified.

2 Background and participants

- 2.1 Scrutiny Committee has a number of roles including, in the context of this work, to maintain an overview of council functions and undertake work aimed at policy development within the Council.

- 2.2 Members proposed this area for a scrutiny work programme topic in the context of the wider issue of asset management. The review covered a wide view into the condition and use of the buildings by studying condition surveys, meeting with some of the community centre volunteers and committees, and sending questionnaires to centres not visited.
- 2.3 Although the focus for the review was not solely on asset management it was acknowledged at an early stage that community centres were held by the council as 'community assets'. In view of the asset management strategy, the review was intended to identify assets in the context of the purpose for which they were held, their cost in use and in their return. This can be measured in terms of cost, monetary value and value to the community and the council.
- 2.4 The review also recognised that the council is not the sole provider of buildings that are available for use by communities and the review set out to take into account these other community spaces as well as those provided by the council.
- 2.5 The task and finish group consisted of Cllr's Galvin, Gee, Sands and Storie. The work of the group was co-ordinated by the head of neighbourhood services. Officers of the council who also gave evidence or were consulted were the head of neighbourhood services, the property services manager – operations, the communities and neighbourhood manager (south), the deputy chief executive and the cabinet portfolio holder for environment and neighbourhoods. The scrutiny officer also advised the members.
- 2.6 The task & finish group would like to thank all the witnesses who gave evidence to the review.

2.7 **Terms of reference**

For an area of work to be included in the scrutiny committee work programme, topics are assessed using the PICC analysis.

PICC stands for **P**ublic interest, **I**mpact, **C**ouncil performance, and keeping in **C**ontext and in order for a topic to be placed onto the scrutiny committee work programme all four of the criteria need to be satisfied.

The review of community space was assessed and it was agreed by scrutiny committee that the proposal met all four criteria.

Terms of reference were agreed by the task and finish group which included:

- the scope of the task
- the summary of overall anticipated benefits
- intended outcomes and

- indicators of success

These are detailed below:

Scope – to set up a scrutiny task & finish group to report its recommendations to the scrutiny committee regarding the distribution, social benefit and the council's role in the provision of community space, and assist in the drawing up of assessment criteria. Excluded from the scope were open spaces and commercial businesses.

Summary of overall anticipated benefits and intended outcomes:

- Foundations for provision of performance criteria as an aid through the identification of the pre requisites of success to the provision of socially beneficial community space
- Effective and good value provision
- Improved links between the council and other providers
- Rationalization and improved integration of provision for usage of a range/diversity of groups
- To assess the most appropriate body to provide community space
- Map and register of geographical distribution of council centres, church halls, school halls, facilities for older people and facilities for younger people

In agreeing the terms of reference and scope of the review, the task and finish group set some measures of success from which the anticipated benefits and intended outcomes could be measured.

Indicators of success:

- The embedding and implementation of best practice for community space providers that is measured against and linked to the council's key performance measures and a suite of performance criteria
- Level of positive feedback from public surveys
- Level of footfall

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The group used a number of different approaches to the review, including:
- visiting several community centres/venues and meeting the centre managers and volunteers
 - developing and distributing a survey to gather evidence from the centres that were not visited
 - reviewing reports of similar reviews undertaken within other local authorities
 - Information from relevant surveys and research

- Interviewing relevant council officers
 - Seeking the views of the Portfolio holder for environment and neighbourhoods
- 3.2 An informal survey of residents was also undertaken by Green party councillors by door knocking residents in certain wards. The survey is a sample and not necessarily representative of a cross section of residents but served as a useful guide by members. (see appendix 3)
- 3.3 Overall, there has been good level of participation in this review and whilst the centre volunteers were engaged, unless these individuals also ran activities, users of community centres were not engaged in the review.
- 3.4 It is important that those who run the centres should continue to be involved in the implementation of recommendations that are taken forward and those that use the centres should be encouraged to become more involved in the running and day to day management of the centres that they make use of.
- 3.5 Prior to the report being presented to scrutiny committee, the community centre management committees and community association volunteers were invited to attend a briefing where they had an opportunity to listen to and comment on the recommendations.

4. Community space in Norwich (policy context)

- 4.1 The policy context for community centre provision be it centres owned by the council or those owned and run by other organisations that may be supported by council officer time, is from the council's neighbourhood and community engagement strategies.
- 4.2 Cabinet adopted a neighbourhood strategy in March 2007, which set out a vision for neighbourhoods. This was that *"a successful, sustainable neighbourhood will:*
- be clean and well cared for by the community and the Council
 - feel safe to live in and move around
 - contain community facilities and activities that cater for the needs of its community; whether young, old or with special or particular needs and interests
 - have local people who take responsibility for their own lives and those of their families
 - have lively challenging community organisations that champion the needs of the people and the neighbourhood and who work to meet those needs independently"
- 4.3 In November 2008 a community engagement strategy was endorsed by Cabinet. This identified the importance and value of the council working together with residents and communities to *"create neighbourhoods where people feel secure, where the streets are clean*

and well maintained, where there is good quality housing and local amenities and where there are active local communities”.

- 4.4 The community engagement strategy provided some examples of how the council would act together with residents that are relevant to this review. These include:
- helping local groups to set up to run things like community centres
 - helping you to set up independent community groups to focus on things that are important (to residents), which may require premises.
- 4.5 This approach aims to support strong, active and inclusive communities, and help to improve public services to improve quality of life for people in Norwich by:
- building strong communities, who can form and support their own organisations.
 - bringing people together to deal with their common concerns.
 - helping people to build the skills they need to improve quality of life in their own communities.
- 4.6 Two relevant themes contained within this strategy are particularly relevant:
- *Theme 5 - community centres supporting and developing locally managed community centres and facilities*
 - *Theme 7 - supporting communities to do it for themselves, including providing information, advice, guidance and sign posting*
- 4.7 The council's community engagement officers are key to the implementation of these areas of work and volunteers from all of the community spaces visited commented positively about their role and how valuable their support was.
- 4.8 **Council resources**
Although in recent years, a number of improvements have been carried out and funded by the community associations/centre management committees themselves, the community centres owned by the council are largely funded from council budgets.
- 4.9 They therefore need to provide good value for money and meet the council's wider objectives. As, to a certain extent, do other centres not owned by the council, for example the Phoenix Centre, which receive support from the council through the community engagement officers.
- 4.10 The task and finish group interviewed the council's property services manager who briefed the members on the level of funds allocated to the council's community centres in recent years and the types of works carried out by the council.

5. Observations and findings

The buildings

- 5.1 As owner of the centres, the council has a duty to maintain them, but the level of the work undertaken has reduced in recent years to a basic level as the council's resources have reduced.
- 5.2 The funding for maintenance at community centres sits within the council's overall buildings repair and maintenance programme, which prioritises health and safety requirement first. This has left some centres, although respectable, looking dated, sometimes shabby and uninviting. Many are expensive to heat due to their age, lack of insulation and out of date heating systems. This has an impact on morale and potential users and usage.
- 5.3 Findings from the 2003 "Five Centres Project" in Lakenham and Tuckswood reviewed levels of awareness of the community centres; the extent of volunteering; the barriers to volunteering and marketing and communication issues for the community centres in the area.
- 5.4 This showed that Centres for community level activity needed to be "attractive, accessible and vibrant to attract local people "in the door" to either run and/or attend activities".
- 5.5 "Getting people through the door was a major barrier because the buildings and their appearance were so off-putting".
- 5.6 "To have any chance of gaining critical mass of usage, the Community Centres would have to:
 - Clean up, paint and clear the frontages
 - Increase the light levels outside so people feel safe
 - Update the furniture
 - Let people see in through the windows
 - Increase the warmth, attractiveness and feelings of welcome
 - Increase lighting levels in bars, which are currently intimidating
 - The atmosphere must be alive, warm and welcoming"
- 5.7 These recommendations remain valid today as the council has been unable to invest the resources required to meet these basic recommendations.
- 5.8 Condition surveys of the council's centres were reviewed by the group which provided the members with an overview of the scale and range of liabilities for the council and the community associations themselves. This was done while accepting that there has been an historic under investment in the fabric of the centres in recent years due to the council's budgetary constraints.

The funds available for repairs to council centres come from the council's overall repairs and maintenance budget which has far more

calls upon it than funds available. This provides a significant challenge for investment.

Funds may also come from the council's capital programme as well as external sources raised by the community associations themselves.

Further opportunities to invest in community centres may arise through the community infrastructure levy when this replaces section 106 agreements.

Similarly opportunities may arise for new facilities to be developed through the planning system.

- 5.9 It is noticeable when visiting centres, that where active and strong committees have taken action themselves, the buildings are friendlier more accessible and a dynamic facility.
- 5.10 The benefit of visiting a cross section of community spaces was being able to see the works undertaken by the community association themselves, the varied condition that exists between the centres and to discuss the roles and responsibilities as set out in the license.
- 5.11 A break down of costs was provided so that the scale, type and cost of day to day works that the council undertakes could be understood. This includes annual electric and gas checks, minor repairs through to major works such as boiler or kitchen replacement. On top of this would also be the more major structural work.
- 5.12 The group found where works are carried out by the council, the community associations reported that:
- liaising with council's property staff was generally effective, though some experienced difficulties in reporting repairs
 - there are at times issues reported in working with contractors (working on behalf of the council) who do not understand that the centres are run by volunteers and may have a limited level of availability
 - some community associations feel that the completion of repairs is slow.

Finances

- 5.14 Centres are generally functioning well with most maintaining 'break even' levels of funding from their activities. Those which explore other methods of income generation, such as renting rooms on a semi-permanent basis, running shops and social clubs, have found this to be potentially lucrative if run effectively.
- 5.15 However, whilst social clubs may help financially, may draw in more people and also provide a bar facility that can be used for private hire;

they can also bring a separate range of issues to be dealt with.

- 5.16 There are occasions when some community associations find themselves unable to cover unexpectedly large or untimely (in terms of their cash flow), utility bills and on these occasions the council has been able in recent years to make a one off grant.

The Volunteers

- 5.18 There is a wide diversity of approach across the centres, although some elements are shared, committees have been allowed to develop individually to reflect local opportunities and the local community. This has led to varying levels of success across the city. Some centres appear to be under used, while others are at capacity.
- 5.19 The many volunteers that are involved in running community spaces work very hard, often in quite challenging roles and conditions, but there are not enough of them. People are absolutely critical to success, but many centres find it difficult to recruit to committee roles. When numbers on committees shrink too far, the efficient functioning of the centre starts to be at risk. There was little evidence of centres being given organised help with recruitment, induction and retention of volunteers into leadership roles.
- 5.20 Promotion of centres is limited either by the council or the centres themselves. Centres would like the council to do more through its communication channels. Only a limited number of centres have a website and where they exist, the associations find them productive. The most commonly stated communication modes were word of mouth and notice boards.

The activities

- 5.21 Centres deliver a wide range of activities to astonishingly diverse audiences, and help the council to deliver equality of opportunity and provision for diversity. They can help build community and individuals' capacity and social cohesion. Most centres share the same basic vision: to offer a place for good value, safe, activities which meet the needs of local people, and wish their work to be of lasting importance and value to the local community.
- 5.22 Although the neighbourhood strategy and the community engagement strategy are closely related to the issue, there is no specific strategic basis for the city council's provision of community space. Thus, centres do not have business aims aligned to a core approach. However, although not presently required to do so, the centres do deliver on some aspects of the corporate plan:
- To make Norwich a safe and clean city (% of people feeling safe)
 - To make Norwich a city of character and culture – to provide a

range of cultural and leisure opportunities and events for people (% of people satisfied with council leisure and cultural activities; number of people attending free or low cost events provided through the council)

- To provide value for money services (% of residents satisfied with services they received from the council)

- 5.23 Community centres require external support to guide, support and develop their work. The level of support from the council has reduced over a number of years through staffing changes (such as community activity organisers and community development officers) and broader capacity building and volunteer development activities such as networking meetings and training events.
- 5.24 The support that is still available through community engagement officers is highly valued and often critical on an operational level. There is a perception that the council has become distant and that an increasing level of responsibilities are being shouldered by the centre volunteers.
- 5.25 There is also some impatience with broader legislative red tape such as food safety and fire safety requirements being two recent but important obligations that rest with the centre volunteers. Without exception, those community centres engaged, said that they considered the city council their most important partner, and one which they would like to work with more.
- 5.26 The task & finish group gave some consideration to geographical distribution of centres with some informal mapping of provision carried out. It was noted that originally, community centres were built by the council in areas where housing stock was developed. Many of these areas have become overtime, areas of deprivation. Buildings appear to be fairly well sited in relation to social need, but no work has been done to assess if this is actually the case and it is not entirely clear how they relate to the neighbourhood management areas or other providers facilities. On a neighbourhood basis, the south has four council owned centres, east three, north two and the west six.

6. Future context and recommendations

- 6.1 The task and finish group found a mixed and perhaps underused range of assets but equally groups of hard working, enthusiastic but at times overwhelmed volunteers that were aiming to do their best for the communities.
- 6.2 Given the harsh operating conditions, yet high value given to the centres, the Task and Finish group has sought to provide a strong set of seven recommendations to build on the strengths of community space provision in the city and address weaknesses.

The appended SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) provides a summary of the key evidence that members found during their review that relates to the distribution, social benefit and the council's role in the provision of community space.

- 6.3 Over arching this is a proposed purpose for the centres, given that there is no specific strategic framework for the provision of council centres.

- 6.4 The task and finish group agreed the following as a draft purpose:

Community centres, provide space and facilities for community led services and activities that contribute to the health and well being of communities. Centres along side other community groups and activities, some of which are located in these buildings, are an extremely important resource and can play an important role in the social and economic regeneration of the city and contribution to the corporate priorities of a safe and clean city; a prosperous city and a city of character and culture.

These venues are where local residents can meet, organise community activities or events and where statutory agencies can provide easy access to services.

This purpose provides a context that can shape the future of community centres with the opportunity to more clearly link them with the council's priorities, at the same time recognising that they need to reflect and respect the needs and aspirations of communities as well as the council's budgetary constraints.

- 6.5 The task and finish group make the following recommendations:

- a) The council celebrates and continues to provide support to the volunteers who run the council's community centres.
- b) **Increased networking and collaboration:** the council works with the community associations and other community space providers to encourage closer working and collaboration. Working with the community associations and providers, the council sets out a clear purpose for community space and develops a more sustainable business model and performance management framework for council owned centres and associated guidance for other centres with which it works. Community feedback should be gathered and used to develop the use of these centres. Closer working may lead to the development of a community space forum which could explore how additional external grants could be accessed that the centres may otherwise not have access to (as long as this does not conflict with centres themselves).
- c) **Accountability and management:** in line with all other council services or assets, performance of council owned community

centres should be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they offer value for money and are sustainable. However, this should reflect that the centres are operated on a day to day basis by volunteers. For this to be effective, the council works with the community centres (and forum if it comes to fruition) to draw up criteria that can be used to indicate the effectiveness of each centre including best value, how the centre delivers against the council's priorities and incorporate best practice. Centres will be supported as resources allow, to deliver to high standards. The Council will develop a viability and decommissioning process identifying the occasions it might be used. Opportunities to increase centre income will be maximised and be encouraged where possible, but not to the detriment of community use.

- d) Training and mentoring:** the council will work with community centres, other community space providers (and forum if it comes to fruition) to develop and deliver directly or indirectly, a learning and shadowing programme encompassing both its own centres and other provision. This should incorporate an accreditation scheme where possible.
- e) The council's role:** the council recognises that effective community centres can deliver against a number council priorities including social inclusion, learning, diversity and equality at a local level. The council should explore how the role of community spaces can be developed further, whilst at the same time ensuring its own community centres are prepared to be more resilient in times of financial constraints including signposting to more sustainable funding sources. The council explores how councillors as community leaders and champions can contribute to the development of these centres. The council continues to recognise that it may not be the only or best provider for community space in a given area of the city and the distribution of space needs to be monitored and reviewed to ensure that:
- Residents have access to a community space from which they can develop, run or access activities and services
 - That the spaces are aspirational
 - The views of residents around community centres are captured

The council should also develop investment criteria for its own centres that should reflect a range of quantitative and qualitative information including usage, location and local needs.

- f) Strategic development:** the council develops an approach to mapping the distribution and use of community provision across the city which is informed by levels of deprivation, crime and disorder, health and wellbeing, to identify priority areas, levels of oversupply. The council should seek to use and promote the use of the centres more widely to deliver other services, e.g. housing advice sessions, other public sector provision local consultations etc, so that they

become important hubs within the community. The council should also work collaboratively with partner organisations to use the centres.

- g) Environmental audit;** the council develops a cost effective maintenance scheme including a full environmental audit of all its centres and goes on to retro fit them to the highest energy saving standards, and explores partnership with the local Norfolk County Council Energy Services Company (ESCO) to deliver this.
- h) Communication;** the council explores the development and hosting of an on-line 'open data' directory of provision, giving groups access to update and input into it. This would allow residents to find out the types of provision where they live. This could involve for example developing an interactive GIS community space map covering provision from the council and other providers. The council should in conjunction with community associations, actively promote the community centres through all its communication channels, to convey what is available in terms of space and activities, and to encourage local residents to get involved in using and running the buildings.
- i) Monitoring of recommendations** – the implementation of these recommendations should be reported to scrutiny when appropriate; the development of performance, assessment or funding criteria should be reported to scrutiny committee for comment

Norwich City Council Scrutiny task and finish group: Community space

Notes Cllr Lucy Galvin - Visits to community centres

- 1.1 Phoenix Centre, Mile Cross
- 1.2 Clover Hill, Bowthorpe
- 1.3 Belvedere Centre, Nelson ward
- 1.4 Oak Grove Chapel, Catton Grove
- 1.5 Jubilee Centre, Lakenham
- 1.6 Harford Centre, South Harford and Tuckswood

1.1 Phoenix Centre, Mile Cross

There is no council owned community centre in Mile Cross. The Phoenix Centre is funded by £300K lottery grant; held in trust by children and young people of Mile Cross. Peter Lemmon, centre manager, has been involved for 22 years.

Use

Well used: currently there are four new volunteers under 18; over 100 children a week use centre, as well as a range of private clubs inc: youth clubs, Drawing Buddies, holiday schemes, community café, slimming world, Sing Your Heart Out, church groups, parties, clairvoyant meetings, civil unions (building is still a church!), debt management, Polish Scouts, Native American belly dancers, Sikh parties, Muslim club.

Ambitions

- Would like to see it used more – capacity in day only 50% used
- Children are priority – but would also like to do things for pensioners
- Get on top of running costs (eg water bill)

Secrets of success

- Affordable prices
- Listen to what people want
- Get funding
- Ongoing support of council's community engagement officers (for child protection, health and safety, first aid, event management etc)

“I’m not a professional centre manager, I’m a road worker. I may have been doing this for twenty years but I need advice on legal duties, regulations, and many other things. We depend on the support of the city council, even though we are not a council centre.” Peter Lemmon, centre manager

1.2 Clover Hill, Bowthorpe

There are two community centres in Bowthorpe (the other is at Chapel Break). This is a council owned centre with a 20 hour a week member of staff, Sally

Use

Currently under-used, although has been better used in recent times. Recent use has been by: Joy of Food (healthy cooking club), Families United of Norwich (Christian based group for ethnic minorities), Flying Classrooms (English language group for Saudi women, with crèche), Crossroads Care (look after young carers), Holidays at Home (for isolated people), Bowthorpe's Got Talent (show), arts competition, quiz, baking competition

Two hire rates – standard (private) and subsidised (local, voluntary groups). Need to make £1500 a month to cover costs. It is possible to cover costs and run like a small business, but only with council support

Ambitions

- To get more regular users, volunteers and committee members
- To identify the needs of their community (this will enable them to access funding)
- Sort out obsolete IT suite – 16 computers not longer in use
- Performing Rights Licence – this has been difficult to organise in past

Secrets of success

- Council support – building and expertise
- Paid member of staff
- Committed committee
- Fun one-off events to draw users in
- Volunteers get a chance to train, integrate in community

“We don't earn enough money to keep the whole thing going. We have to try to find a sensible line between encouraging people in, and making sure we get enough in to make it worth it to us. The council is absolutely vital in providing the building and keeping the centre going and provides excellent support.” Sally

1.3 Belvedere Centre, Nelson ward

Run by Sharon, with a large and active team. The only centre visited with a bar open Mon, Tues, Weds, weekends. This brings in an income (around £1k a month) and adds value for private hirers. Social club has 300 members.

Use

50:50 inside and outside local community use. Includes family nights eg Halloween, easter, Xmas – very popular with families outside area (had just taken a booking of 20 from Mile Cross) – no charge for children, £2 for adults; regular holiday trips; coach day trips, religious study group; political meetings; short mat bowls, tea dance, street dancing, baby sensory group, Active Norfolk, bar

Community events are free; room hire/user groups are subsidised by centre

Ambitions

- Improve front aspect of centre – first impressions are important

- Keep volunteers supported through challenging times eg local ASB, difficult behaviour by some users – volunteers need support and training too

Secrets of success

- Working together as a team, listening to each other, having in-depth discussions
- Help from city council community engagement officers (especially at times of difficulty, eg after former chair died and replacement got into irregular behaviour)
- Getting others involved - eg Norwich Union team bonding day as way of decorating centre
- Being clear what it wants to achieve
- Working with local councillors eg to hold public meeting in time of trouble; to get cycle racks installed
- Making sure it's fun
- Energy efficiency – got grant funding via Rachel Watson Carbon Reduction Trust for double glazing, boiler, new cavity walls etc.

“We don’t use the word committee. We use the word team. We work hard together, and if things get difficult we lift each other. Young and old, we all come and put in our hours. And we make sure it is fun!”
Sharon

1.4 Oak Grove Chapel, Catton Grove

Ian Savory, Pastor. Centre run by independent evangelical church. Built on a model of ‘mission communities’ where people come to the leaders with projects to serve the community. Linked to local school as congregation is now too large for hall, so gifted £270K to double the size of the school hall in return for being able to use it rent free for 20 yrs. Funding has been cut recently (-£70k a year) but this is being made up for by generosity of church members and charity shop income.

Shop - made £33k last year; 80% involved in shop nothing to do with church, 110 people through per day – footfall ‘informally helps to identify need’

Use: estimates 1,000 a week including church services. 40% of the congregation are from Catton Grove/New Catton areas – many others come in from other places like Aylsham and Wroxham. Volunteer base of 100, 60% are involved with church; breakfast club, coffee mornings, community choir (Norfolk Choir of the Year), Walk Jog Run (women’s jogging group), men’s cycling group, accountant, African churches, Congolese church

Ambitions

- Complete revamp of buildings
- Work more closely with council community engagement officer
- ‘Raise a generation of teenagers to serve’
- To find a way out of benefit culture and into useful work for communities
- To support those in need

Secrets of success

- 'Food is incredibly important to everything we do – one of the most important things we have is a table to sit around and eat.'
- Mentoring leaders – strong targets and methods - team of leaders, mentor and working together
- Clarity of purpose – essential to strong leadership and progress in sharing ideas
- Network community lunches – being part of the council's wider network of community engagement has been critical to ensure effort is not duplicated and waste.

“Continuity is huge, and here the council has a major role – it was a council engagement officer who showed me what to do in the early days. Mentoring is critical – we need to stop looking at projects, and start looking at people. If community centres are to thrive rather than survive, then the council needs to look at people not just projects.” Ian Savory

1.5 Jubilee Centre, Lakenham

Rosemary, Paul and Toddler Group manager only members of ctte. Biz Fizz were based at centre for three years, was also used by adult ed but no longer. IT suite has been stripped out.

Use: low. Low connection with community. Toddler Group is currently at centre, also two dog training groups, faith group, Norfolk and Suffolk Dahlia Society, Lifeline Suicide and Bereavement Group, Zumba, ad hoc children's parties.

Ambitions

- Long term strategy needed – want to work with new community engagement officer for area to develop this
- Find out how to make Lakenham more 'community focussed'
- More members for a re energised committee – need 9 people

Secrets of success

- There has been no community engagement officer in this area for three years – now there is one it is hoped this will be a success factor.

“We are not actively promoting use, and currently only encouraging known quantities for bookings, as three people is not enough to run a centre.” Paul

1.6 Harford Centre, South Harford and Tuckswood

Use: Healthy activity – 'We're in a good situation financially, we get 30 messages on answerphone a week' – activities include: tea dance, bowls, bridge, cycle speedway, petanque, bowling, dog training, Koi carp club, Youth Theatre, Cancer relaxation group, slimming club.

National Careers Service pays for the centre to host a terminal which has a Skype link for careers advice – paid enough as a monthly fee to employ centre manager for 11 hrs a week (Mondays).

Did have a small gym but this was operating as a private club and without correct insurance etc, so was given notice several months ago. Was paying £35/week rent.

Centre very appreciative of community engagement officer

Ambitions

- More people on committee – each year they make sure representatives of user groups are represented on committee – but would like more active members.
- Clarify relationship with bar – they find the social club useful as it provides a regular weekly fee, and has also redecorated the room. The bar is useful as having the licence attracts casual hire; it is also no longer the dominant player in the centre. Clientele can be problematic when leaving centre late.

Secrets of success

- Website (harfordcentre.org.uk) - each user group gets a page and keep updated with what's on, contact with National Careers Service came because of website; Facebook and Twitter too
- Having someone regularly there to take bookings
- Link with outdoor groups – Petanque, Cycle Speedway (100 people a week) – officially Ireland's home track – hosts international fixtures, double rink bowling green (two days a week) – all use changing and kitchen facilities

“The website is very useful – it is simple but it works to give contact, prices, and availability. User groups like that they have their space on it too.” Gary Colby, Chairman

Appendix 2

Scrutiny committee task and finish group review of community space SWOT analysis

This SWOT analysis provides a mechanism to summarise the key evidence that members found during their review that relates to the distribution, social benefit and the council's role in the provision of community space

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Committed volunteers; 2. Run by local communities who can understand local needs; 3. Local programmes fulfilling needs for local people eg IT training, Zumba, etc 4. Delivering equality, diversity, learning and health 5. High recognition of council's role 6. Fine tradition of community centre provision in city 7. Significant areas of good practice observed 8. Geographically at the centre of communities 9. People want council to have a role in community centres 10. Centres value relationship and contact with officers in particular community engagement officers 11. Part of the fabric of the democratic process in Norwich as a city – polling stations, consultations etc 12. Social hub where a well-run 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced levels of funds available to the council to invest 2. Over reliance on council or others to provide funding 3. No access to other large pools of money eg lottery funds 4. Some areas of Norwich under represented in terms of community centres 5. Some have chosen not to take advantage of the potential income stream from a licensed social club 6. No clear vision, business model, performance framework or guidance from council 7. Volunteers don't work together and share best practice across centres 8. Little structured opportunity to provide two-way communication regarding programmes and activities within community centres (this was identified by centre members themselves as something that was desirable) 9. Lack of investment in bringing centres up to energy efficient specifications eg insulation of

and well-integrated bar and social club occurs, this can enhance the viability of the centre and its programmes	<p>roof and walls; double glazing and water and heating efficient systems</p> <p>10. Lack of publicity and awareness of centres and what is happening in centres</p> <p>11. Hard to get people out of their armchairs (tyre lever required!) (see opportunities)</p>
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboration between community space providers 2. Delivery of public sector services from centres 3. Delivery of new facilities through the planning system if appropriate 4. New external sources of funding 5. Delivering equality, diversity, learning and health 6. Establishment of a federated approach allowing centres to link cohesively with each other, officers and city council 7. Support volunteers through a system of accreditation and training which could lead to enhanced employment opportunities 8. Ongoing constructive and formative two-way communication between council and centres 9. Some centres appear to be actively looking to be accountable and for advice, assistance and training in management techniques 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People sometimes not willing to take on positions of responsibility on committees 2. Changing social patterns mean significant sectors of community find recreation at home (internet) rather than going out 3. Current funding systems not financially resilient (see opportunities) 4. If a centre is closed for any reason, it may not be replaced (which means the council needs to find new roles and new functions for community centres – see opportunity no's. 2, 3 5. Lack of positive action by council could lead to centres being at risk

<p>10. To re-establish a system of seeking funding sources for community centres eg charitable trusts, Big Lottery etc</p> <p>11. Cut running costs and potentially increase income by increasing energy efficiency and microgeneration (eg no advantage taken when free solar panels were on offer)</p> <p>12. Cohesive communication policy including web, social media, broadcast media (TV and radio), local press, council publications eg website and Citizen); open data</p> <p>13. More events run from centres ... (council and community)</p> <p>14. Funding opportunities e.g. one centre is paid for hosting career terminal at Jubilee centre; church centre second-hand shop makes a good profit;</p> <p>15. 'Opportunity shops' could be established in community centres; co operatives etc.</p>	
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Community centres survey rationale

The survey was run as a randomized door-to-door questionnaire by councillors in Wensum, Town Close, Nelson, Thorpe Hamlet, Mancroft and Sewell wards in October/November 2012. A total of 105 residents gave their responses.

Residents were asked if they had a local community centre. If yes, they were asked which one; if no, they were told which centre was nearest their house. This checked if they were referring to actual rather than assumed community centres. There was also a space for don't know, when they were given the answer. They were then asked if they had been in (Y/N). If Y. what they had done (six options). Also if yes, how many times in past year.

All respondents were asked if they received information about what was on at centre (Y/N). Then in what format (9 options). If N then the formats were offered as a question on how they would like to receive information. There was also a follow up question 'Would you like to have information'.

The penultimate part of the survey asked four questions regarding awareness of city council community centres across city, that they were run by committees of local residents, and if the council should carry on supporting them.

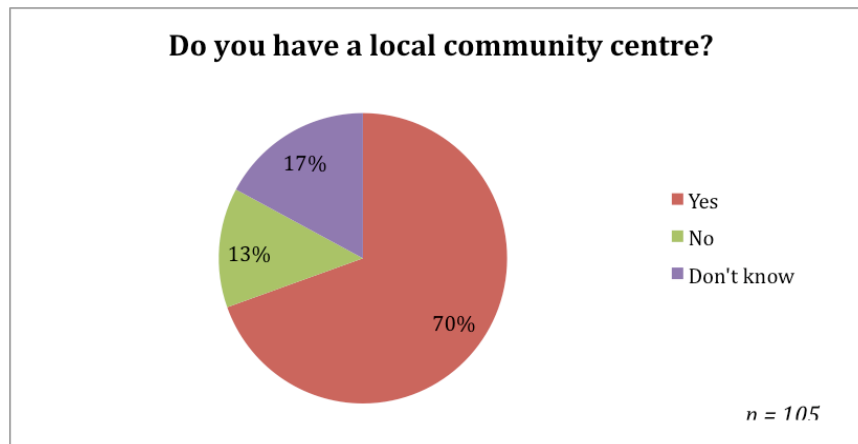
Finally it was asked 'what would you like to see happening at your local community centre' (7 options); 'would you consider helping to run a centre by being on the committee?' (Y/N) and if N what is the main reason why not (not enough spare time/not enough experience).

Further qualitative comments were sought and recorded, and equalities monitoring data was recorded.

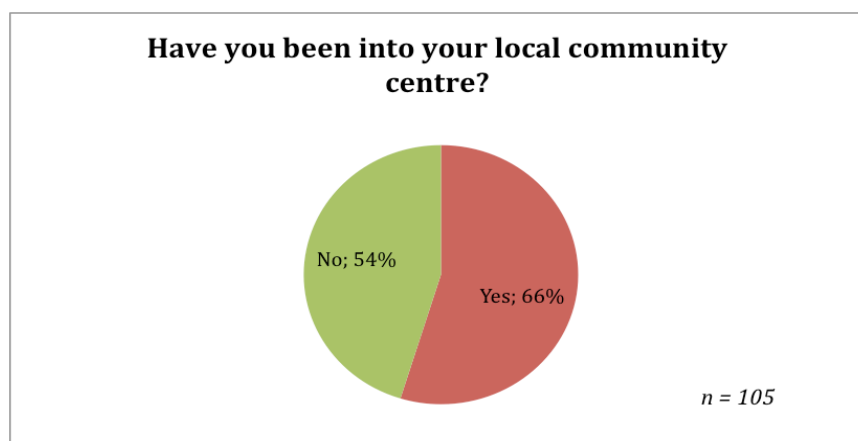
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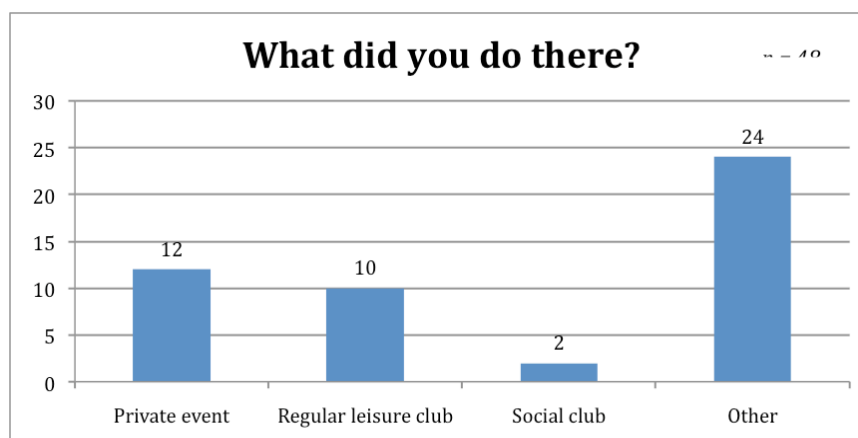
1. Majority questioned knew a community centre existed locally.



2. Majority had been into their local centre.



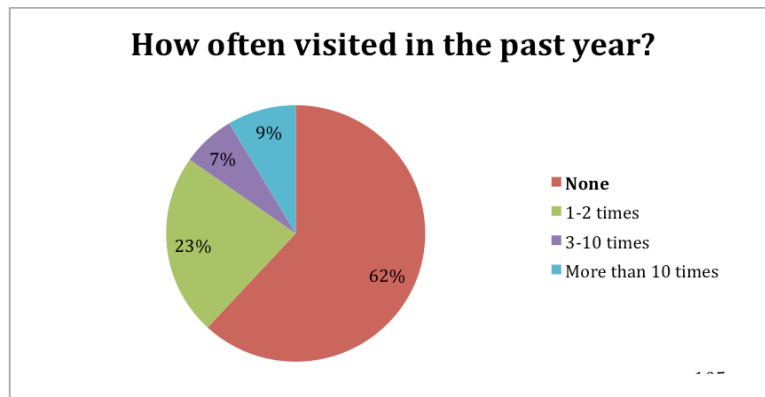
3. There was a diversity of uses, with social club use being low.



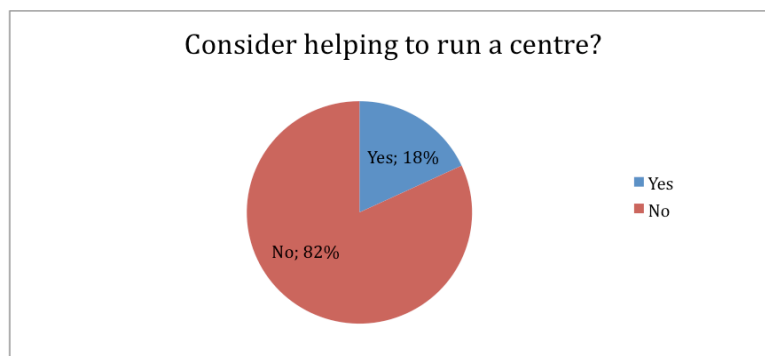
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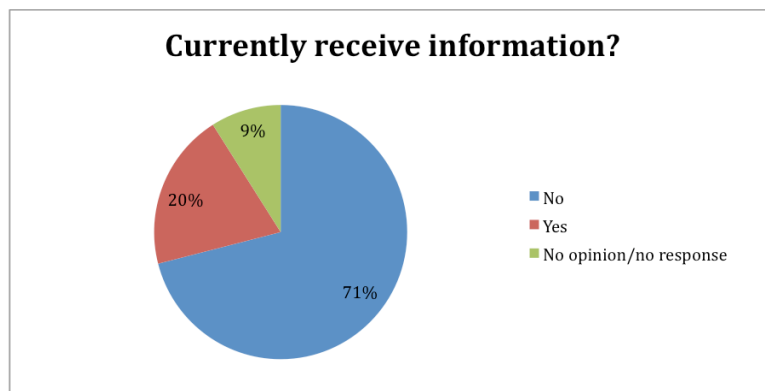
4. A majority did not visit their centres very regularly.



5. While many people would not consider helping to run a centre, there is some interest in doing so.



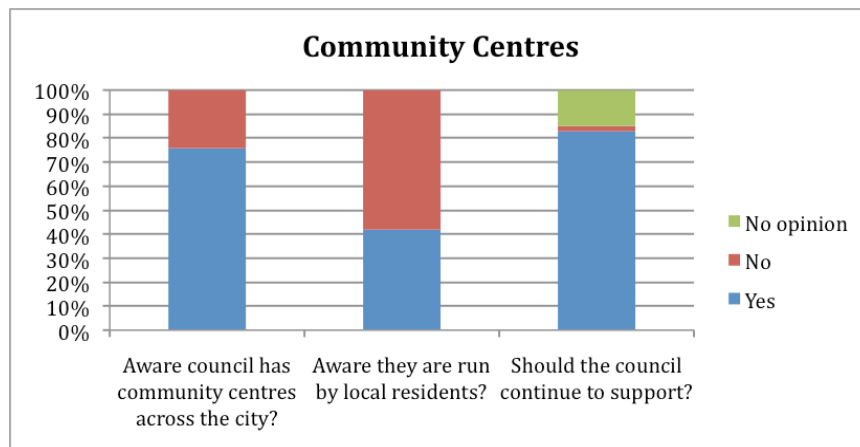
6. A majority did not receive information about their local centre.



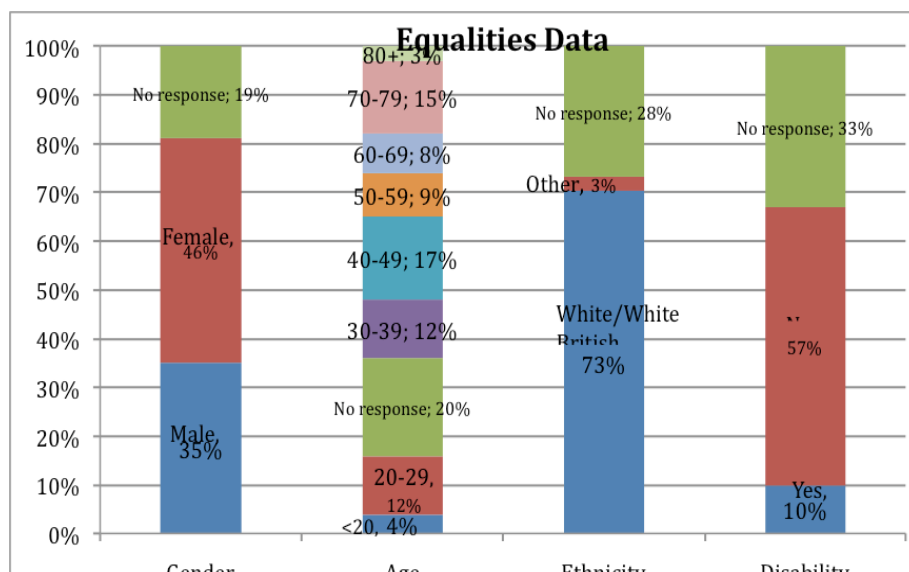
Survey information:

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7. There was high awareness that the council is responsible for community centres, but less than half of respondents were aware that local residents managed them. A strong majority of residents believed the council should continue to run centres, with very few expressing the opposite opinion.



8. Equalities data was recorded



9. Qualitative data was also recorded with some open questions. Comments and suggestions included:

On what else would you like to see happening at community centre:

Knitting circle; book club; more activities for older people, more things for youth 13-14; poetry reading; story telling; pilates; christmas fair; ceilidh; adult education; basic skills training eg literacy, numeracy, life skills, financial advice; drama; art; music; dance; gym children's clubs; dog training; more for youngsters to do, dancing for local kids, more for teenagers to do; bike skills sessions; book sales; secondhand clothes stall; clubs; sports facility; mother and baby, toddlers; advice for elderly; activities for elderly people; keep fit; local produce markets, clothes swaps, quality second hand; hiring, open days, raise awareness, volunteer days, NCFC involvement; anything for kids after school; more youth activities - this should be a priority; Christmas - social functions; brownies, scouts, nursery, parents support groups; police surgeries.

Survey information:

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Ideas on how to run centres in general:

- Better rates for local people for parties; accept cheques as well as cash (cash only at mine at present)
- Inform people when membership runs out.
- Too cliquey.
- Nice to have a drink there as there are no pubs left; open to all for parties - more welcoming.
- Involve young people in running them more.
- Keep some space free for 'pop up' events eg coffee mornings, farmers markets.
- More use needed, more information.
- Everyone goes to vote so chance to share.
- Cuts mean there are difficult decisions to be made.
- Some centres aren't used in the right way.
- I think supporting community centres is really important and council should not cut funding to provision for use especially.
- Community centres need extra funding - I know this through my job which has to apply for funding.
- Community centres are a life line.
- It's about time someone asked these questions.
- Important to be more open to the wider community. They are often a closed book to people who live in the area - a tight niche group have control and people are aware of that and are put off.
- If they are popular they should keep some capacity for newcomers and new ideas.
- This survey has got me thinking. It is worthwhile to engage people to talk about community centres.
- Need to know more about what's going on. I'd like to support them more but I never hear what's on.
- Council should support with ground rules to help them be inclusive and have broad appeal and variety.
- Continue support, there is a great need.
- Community spirit important.
- Feels there is too much red tape to overcome when trying to organise things.
- Very positive about community activities - 'isolation makes people ill'.

Comments on specific centres:

- Local church does its best to offer facilities and space for youth to congregate, but area could use more activities and places for youth.
- Centre has become more of a pub in recent years than a community centre. This makes it off-putting to some who would prefer more community-centred activities - such as for youth.
- You're not made to feel welcome in the centre.
- We used to have an excellent one which I used but the council closed it, Crome Centre. Hope new Muslim community centre on Earlham rd (?sic Dereham Rd) will be a positive contribution god willing.
- Essex Rooms - shame it's closing.
- All pubs in walking distance shut now.
- Some centres run by clique - needs to be more welcoming. Liked community breakfasts in past, but there were cliques.
- One family run the centre and they are a clique.
- The revamped pub - Fat Cat and Canary - is doing a great job of serving the local community. I've met so many neighbours who have now become friends in there. Perhaps we should support local community pubs to do similar work within other areas of the city.
- Council doesn't keep promises - they closed Crome centre.