



NORWICH
City Council

MINUTES

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4:30pm to 6:45pm

7 March 2013

Present: Councillors Manning (vice chair in the chair), Bradford, Brimblecombe, Button, Carlo (substitute for Stephenson), Galvin, Grenville, Howard Lubbock, Maxwell (substitute for Storie), Sands (M) and Stonard

Apologies: Councillors Gee, Storie, and Stephenson

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings held on 21 February 2013

3. TASK AND FINSH GROUP – COMMUNITY SPACE

Councillors Sands and Galvin gave a presentation on the work of the task and finish group which also compromised councillors Storie and Gee. Community centres were dependent on a volunteer base and the group had been impressed with the level of commitment and hard work that centre volunteers put in. The group also thanked officers for their support during the project.

During discussions, members considered the recommendations. Members had welcomed the suggestion that if the community centres could work together, this might in the future enable them to obtain external funding that would not otherwise be available.

Concerns were raised over how an environmental audit might be undertaken and the viability of suggesting a 'retro fit' for all given the diverse state of repair and nature of the buildings concerned. In response, the task and finish group members explained that the recommendation was intended to in part form an audit of the state of the buildings in terms of their energy efficiency as part of the whole picture, including use and potential viability. Community centres and the council would then be prepared for any problems which may arise in the future. It would also encourage centres to look at their own facilities and be aware of any problems so that they could arrange to apply for external funding if needed.

The committee heard that centre managers and volunteers were keen for councillors to visit their local community centres to experience the activities they provided and there was also a need to promote the idea of volunteering. It was noted that centres were vulnerable to losing volunteers and there were not always people willing to come forward and take on a role.

In response to questions from Councillor Driver, the cabinet member for environment and neighbourhoods, the task and finish group explained that the community centres had mostly been built to serve social housing developments with the first centres built in the 1950s and the most recent built in the 1980s. Work was needed to be undertaken to assess if the network of centres covered all areas. Responding to another point, the head of local neighbourhood services emphasised that although the task and finish group had recommended that a decommissioning strategy should be drawn up, this was not the focus of the report and there were no plans currently to close any centres / community spaces. He explained that his team was already undertaking a mapping exercise of public space buildings and churches. There had also been some work to gain an overview of how well community centres were used. The next step would be to develop a simple framework within which to measure the success of the community centres.

Councillor Lubbock expressed concern that some recommendations would raise unrealistic expectations. Recommendation (f) was a very large piece of work as it referred to mapping 'community provisions' across the city and she suggested that this be refined. Other recommendations such as (c) may dissuade volunteers from being involved in the centres if they were subject to any kind of assessment. The members of the task and finish group explained that the idea of evaluation and monitoring had originally been raised by a centre manager as it was felt that this could lead to them being supported more through target setting and clearer guidance from the council.

RESOLVED with one member voting against to ask cabinet to accept the recommendations of the task and finish group as set out below:

- 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

4. ROLE OF THE WARD COUNCILLOR

The executive head of strategy, people and democracy presented the report and the PowerPoint presentation. He explained that due to a delay in the item being considered by the committee, the member development programme had already been agreed. He suggested that members considered the elements of the role within the current role profile and made suggestions on what to include in the future. He reminded the members that the role profile was a general profile and could be added to if they saw fit.

He also explained that a new training course for officers had been rolled out about working in a political environment. Members emphasised that the ward councillor role was an important link between residents and the council when policies were being shaped and needed to be emphasised in the development of the role profile.

The head of local neighbourhood services reported that pilot meetings had been held to begin to pool information from neighbourhood teams and the customer contact team. This meant that local priorities within each of the neighbourhoods could be pulled together. This had begun in the south neighbourhood and then would be continued in the north and then the west neighbourhoods. The east neighbourhood would be rolled out in late April where the approach might need to be slightly different to account for the needs of the city centre. In response to a request from members, the head of local neighbourhood services confirmed that councillors would be involved in measuring the success of the new neighbourhood model.

The executive head of strategy, people and democracy confirmed that social media training would be part of the new learning and development programme and would be included in training.

Members discussed the point in the role profile regarding conducting council business within the council and not through written or broadcast media. Concern was expressed that not all members were always made aware of council announcements and information before it was publically reported. The executive head of strategy, people and democracy explained that there was a councillor / officer working protocol set out in the constitution and this would also be reviewed through the work of the Constitution Working Party. He suggested that this could be a topic that the scrutiny committee may like to consider in the future.

RESOLVED to recognise that the role of the councillor was evolving and the scrutiny committee would look at this item again as part of next year's work programme, once the new neighbourhood operating model had been rolled out.

6. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Members were reminded of the visit to Ipswich Borough Council on the 14 March to observe a scrutiny meeting.

RESOLVED to note the work programme for this year.

CHAIR