

**Report to** Cabinet  
10 July 2013  
**Report of** Head of local neighbourhood services  
**Subject** Scrutiny review of community space

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**Item**

**11**

### **Purpose**

To receive the report and recommendations from scrutiny committee of the review of community space

### **Recommendations**

- (1) That Cabinet thanks the many volunteers that run the council's community centres on its behalf on a day to day basis
- (2) To consider and endorse in principle the recommendations from scrutiny committee
- (3) Subject to the detailed assessments and resource implications of each recommendation highlighted in the report, that officers allocate time to explore in more detail and in conjunction with community space volunteers, partners and other agencies, how they might be implemented
- (4) That progress is reported to scrutiny committee in due course.

### **Corporate and service priorities**

The report helps to meet the corporate priority "A safe and clean city" and the service plan priority to improve the built environment promoting its community, recreational and environmental benefits including: community space, play areas, civic space.

### **Financial implications**

Any budgetary implications that arise from recommendations that are agreed by Cabinet will either be met from approved budgetary provision or be reported to Cabinet separately if there are additional budgetary requirements.

**Ward/s:** All wards

**Cabinet member:** Councillor Kendrick – Neighbourhoods and Community Safety

### **Contact officers**

Bob Cronk - Head of local neighbourhood services	01603 212373
Debra Harris - Communities and neighbourhood manager (south)	01603 213180

### **Background documents**

None

## **Report**

1. In December 2011, scrutiny committee agreed to undertake a review of the council's community centres. The members recognised that as the council is not the sole provider of these types of facilities they agreed that this review should look wider than council owned assets.
2. Scrutiny committee established a task and finish group to undertake this work the group visited a cross section of community spaces; talked to volunteer management committee and community association volunteers and researched best practice from other local authorities.
3. The scope of the work of the task and finish group was to review 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.
4. The task and finish group presented the recommendations to representatives from the council's community centres prior to them being reported to scrutiny committee in March 2013 where they were endorsed.
5. The scrutiny committee report is included at appendix 1.
6. Officers have subsequently undertaken an assessment of each of the recommendations focussing on the resource implications and their deliverability.

### **Assessment of recommendations**

#### **General**

7. The council celebrates and continues to provide support to the volunteers who run the council's community centres.

#### **Assessment**

8. The council has a long history of supporting community action and in particular the work undertaken by the community associations and management committees of the council's community centres. Cabinet fully endorses the recommendation that the work of centre volunteers is celebrated.
9. Following a nomination from the council, the chair of Catton Grove community centre management committee received the British Empire Medal in the 2013 New Year's honours list. Whilst this was one individual, it illustrates the high regard that the council has for volunteers who commit time to the running of these assets.

### **Recommendation 1 - Increased networking and collaboration**

10. 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).

### **Assessment**

11. This recommendation can be taken forward by the community engagement officers and can be incorporated into their work programmes during the year. Officers will explore with the council's community centre committees and volunteers from other community spaces:
  - (1) How they would like to see closer working develop and what they would like to achieve from greater collaboration
  - (2) Through a workshop, develop success criteria for community centres that might be used within a performance framework linked to the council's asset management and community engagement strategies. This could form part of an annual "health check" for each council owned centre that could cover for example, activities, finances, governance, health and safety and safeguarding
  - (3) Feedback on community spaces can be captured through the regular neighbourhood engagement activities such as walkabouts, attendance at events and from partners and ward councillors

### **Recommendation 2 – Accountability and management**

12. 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.

### **Assessment**

13. Officers will explore with the council's community centre committees and volunteers from other community spaces success criteria for community centres that might be used within a performance framework linked to the council's asset management and community engagement strategies.
14. This work can be undertaken within existing resources.
15. The development of a viability and de-commissioning process for the council's community centres and where it might be used, should be informed by and form part of the council's asset management strategy.

16. The strategy provides the framework to help define, implement and measure how the council maintains and improves its property and land assets. For the purposes of community centres this might be that they are fit for purpose, meeting the needs of communities, available at a local level and being run efficiently and effectively.
17. The strategy sets out an asset review process and advice will be sought from NPS Norwich about how a viability and decommissioning process for community centres might fit with this process and best practice will be reviewed from other local authorities about how such a process is developed.
18. Opportunities for increased usage for the centres would bring benefits to residents and communities with centres having the potential to act as local service hubs and bring increased resilience to the centres and centre management committees themselves.
19. The centre management committees, the neighbourhood teams, other service areas including NPS Norwich can contribute to achieving this and this recommendation can be progressed on this basis.

### **Recommendation 3 – Training and mentoring**

20. 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.

### **Assessment**

21. Through the work to take forward recommendation 1, learning and development needs of the volunteers who run community spaces across the city can be captured. A programme to deliver against these needs would ideally be undertaken across all community space volunteers to ensure the programme is practically and financially sustainable.
22. There may be opportunities to undertake this in collaboration with Voluntary Norfolk, with whom the council has a grant agreement which sets out to support capacity building of the third sector in Norwich.
23. Opportunities to sign post volunteers on an informal basis will be encouraged and this recommendation will be progressed through the community engagement officers.

### **Recommendation 4 – the Council's role**

24. The council recognises that effective community centres can deliver against a number of 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:

- (1) Residents have access to a community space from which they can develop, run or access activities and services
- (2) That the spaces are aspirational
- (3) 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.

## **Assessment**

25. Officers are fully aware that due to the council's financial constraints, the council has been unable to invest in the fabric of the buildings and the capacity of the community centre management committees to the level that is desirable.
26. For the council owned centres to be truly effective, there needs to be commitment from the council as well as the management committees who operate them on a day to day basis, on behalf of the council and the communities they serve.
27. The outcome is that whilst some community centres provide a diverse range of lively and locally relevant activities, some of the buildings are not aspirational; activities are at times limited; an increasing level of responsibility is placed on fewer volunteers and other organisations are able to provide better or at least similar quality facilities.
28. Greater collaboration between community spaces and Voluntary Norfolk, may result in centres benefiting by learning from each other, developing joint funding bids to improve facilities or finding new volunteers.
29. Ward councillors could make a valuable contribution to the development of community spaces as part of their community leadership role and some ward councillors are already involved in centre management committees. Whilst recognising that there are increasing demands on ward councillor's time, opportunities for greater involvement or support requirements at specific centres could be promoted to councillors.
30. The council's financial constraints will not improve in the short to medium term and community centres will continue to have to compete for financial resources with other council owned assets and programmes.
31. Greater collaboration with partners and with communities could contribute to the development of community centres and spaces and provide an opportunity to access external sources of funding. Certain agencies and organisations already deliver or support activities at certain centres which can be built upon and this recommendation will be prioritised as resources become available and progressed on this basis.

## **Recommendation 5 - strategic development**

32. 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.

### **Assessment**

33. Through the council's work to inform an ageing well programme, a mapping was undertaken of activities for older people that took place in community spaces and other venues. A similar audit was undertaken in conjunction with the Norwich youth advisory board for young people.
34. Whilst these provided valuable information they were discreet pieces of work to inform specific programmes and any future auditing would be undertaken to support clear outcomes as there is no dedicated resource to do this.
35. None the less, at a basic level, all staff will be asked to update this information as they become aware of changes or additions as the information will have wider benefits to the council's front line work.
36. The council should consider how in conjunction with the community associations and management committees, the community centres can be more widely promoted as venues for local activity. During 2012, the neighbourhood housing service used two centres for events for tenants which showed the value the centres have as local venues.
37. The council's accommodation strategy also suggests the opportunity for facilities such as community spaces acting as local 'hubs' with staff making use of these buildings through more mobile working. Whilst this would require support from the community associations and improvements in IT, it could contribute to more effective use of the centres, and make a contribution to different outcomes.
38. This recommendation can be explored further on this basis.

## **Recommendation 6 – environmental audit**

39. 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.

### **Assessment**

40. Work to improve the energy efficiency of two community centres was undertaken in 2008 with grant funding from Government. Given the age and lay out of the council's community centres, utility costs are a major drain on the community association's budgets. Any mechanism that would reduce these costs, and reduce the carbon footprint of the buildings would be welcomed.

41. The first action would be to survey the buildings and obtain an energy performance certificate (EPC) for each centre. The NPS property manager has estimated that the cost to do this for all 15 centres would be in the region of £6,500 and no budgetary provision currently exists to do this work.
42. Funding to undertake this work would therefore need to be found externally and advice will be sought from the council's environmental strategy manager on where this might be sourced so that the work could be undertaken, perhaps on a rolling basis.
43. An EPC would provide a report outlining the possible improvements that could be made to each of the buildings. Proposals would need to be prioritised and bids made to the council's general fund repairs and maintenance budget or the capital programme. These would compete with other bids that came forward at the time. Alternatively, external sources of funds would need to be identified and bids made, perhaps led by the centres themselves with the support of the council.
44. Sources of funds will be explored to have EPCs put in place for each centre as the first stage of implementing this recommendation.

#### **Recommendation 7 - communication**

45. 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.

#### **Assessment**

46. Active promotion of the centres is covered above as has the capture of information about activities and services.
47. On-line directories have been developed by a number of organisations to provide up to date, relevant location specific information on activities and services.
48. One example was the Norfolk Blurb website which was hosted by Norfolk Children's Services which developed and updated by young people for young people. These are often dependent on key individuals or volunteers or are part of universal provision.
49. The recommendation from scrutiny committee is for the council to explore the development of a self updating directory. One model could be for the council to host a GIS mapping based directory which may eventually be possible through one of the council's programmed IT improvement projects.
50. Although the resource implications cannot be estimated, they are likely to be considerable, and it is arguable whether this is or should be core council business.

51. An alternative approach could be for the council to encourage the development and hosting of such a tool through the voluntary sector with the council providing support and guidance.
52. Therefore, this is how it is suggested that this recommendation is taken forward.

### **Recommendation 8 - monitoring of recommendations**

53. 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

### **Assessment**

54. It is suggested that progress is reported to scrutiny committee in due course.



## Integrated impact assessment



**NORWICH**  
City Council

The IIA should assess **the impact of the recommendation** being made by the report

Detailed guidance to help with completing the assessment can be found [here](#). Delete this row after completion

### Report author to complete

Committee:	Cabinet
Committee date:	10 July 2013
Head of service:	Bob Cronk
Report subject:	Scrutiny review of community spaces
Date assessed:	7 June 2013
Description:	

	Impact			
Economic (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Finance (value for money)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Costs to take forward the recommendations have cost implications for the council. However, some of these will make more effective use of council assets and potentially reduce the costs of running community centres.
Other departments and services e.g. office facilities, customer contact	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
ICT services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Economic development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Financial inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greater use of community spaces for social, leisure, learning or service provision can reduce social and financial exclusion and provide access to low cost activities and services
Social (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Safeguarding children and adults	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<u>S17 crime and disorder act 1998</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greater use of community spaces for social, leisure, learning or service provision can reduce social exclusion and provide access to low cost activities and services
Human Rights Act 1998	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	Impact			
Health and well being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greater use of community spaces for social, leisure, learning or service provision can enhance the health and well being of communities and some of the cities most socially excluded residents
Equality and diversity (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Relations between groups (cohesion)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Greater use of community spaces for social, leisure, learning or service provision across communities can bring communities together and break down barriers that may exist between communities of interest or identity.
Eliminating discrimination & harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Advancing equality of opportunity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Volunteering in community spaces can enhance social and life skill thereby enhancing equality of opportunity
Environmental (please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Natural and built environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Waste minimisation & resource use	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Pollution	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sustainable procurement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	Impact			
Energy and climate change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The recommended eco-retrofit of centres could if implemented reduce energy use
(Please add an 'x' as appropriate)	Neutral	Positive	Negative	Comments
Risk management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Recommendations from impact assessment	
Positive	
Greater and more effective use of the council's community centres can bring wide benefits to communities	
Negative	
Neutral	
Issues	