

**Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)**

**Report to Scrutiny Board (Resources and Council Services)**

**Date: 24 February 2014**

**Subject: Community centres**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Killingbeck & Seacroft, Burmantofts & Richmond Hill, Gipton & Harehills, Chapel Allerton, Wetherby, Alwoodley, Middleton Park, Beeston & Holbeck, City & Hunslet, Rothwell, Ardsley & Robin Hood, Morley North, Morley South, Kippax & Methley, Cross Gates & Whinmoor, Garforth & Swillington, Kirkstall, Hyde Park & Woodhouse, Weetwood, Otley & Yeadon, Bramley & Stanningley, Armley, Calverley & Farsley, Pudsey, Farnley & Wortley		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

**1 Purpose of this report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to record progress with the improved arrangements for the Community Centre portfolio and to consult the board on future plans.

**2 Background information**

2.1 Members will recall past discussion at the board which considered

- The complicated and bureaucratic arrangements in place for the use of community centres;
- The numerous charging rates and their complicated application; and
- The need for continued involvement of Area Committees in the process.

2.2 The board also noted the transfer of the community centre portfolio to Citizens and Communities as of 1st October 2013 and the arrangements in place to address the identified failings in the current process.

### **3 Main issues**

3.1 The Community centre service has been moved to Citizens and communities directorate for a number of reasons

- Closer links with localities, the area teams and local councillors on Area (Community) Committees are important stakeholders;
- To focus the work of community centres alongside the citizens@leeds brand supporting the work to tackle poverty;
- To contribute to local community development and regeneration in the poorest areas.

3.2 There is a need for more discussion – including with members about their vision for the contribution which the centres make to each locality.

3.2.1 That should include transparency in the funding to understand the ‘balance sheet’ of costs and benefits, both financial and non-financial.

3.2.2 Questions which we have considered include

- Is the current expenditure on the community centre portfolio seen as a sensible and productive use of council funds?
- Should the objective of the pricing policy be to cover the costs of running the portfolio, or is it to subsidise and add to the council’s investment? Should a pricing policy aim to target profit making organisations and allow voluntary / community organisations to have subsidised use of community centres?

We have concluded that community centres play a valuable role in bringing communities together, young and older people, providing a place to meet, learn and to positively engage. This work supports the Council’s wider objectives, and it is appropriate for the council to support the effective running of the buildings. Nevertheless we also need to maximise the income generated from users so that the cost to the council are controlled. It is also appropriate to consider what can be done to avoid duplication.

### **3.3 Lettings**

3.3.1 The Scrutiny Board has made clear the concerns which members have with the lettings service, with examples of poor customer experience. These issues have been discussed with the Head of Facilities and these are our conclusions:

3.3.2 The lettings team being organisationally part of the Civic Enterprise Leeds arrangements offers benefits which we are wary of losing. There is close connection with the other parts of the facilities management service which are crucial to the operational success of the community centres. In particular, caretaking, key holding, cleaning and security.

3.3.3 With the overall service based in the Civic Hall in Citizens and Communities, and lettings in the same building as part of the facilities management service it is

recommended that there are no further structural changes, rather the services work together to improve processes to achieve the outcomes which are required.

3.3.4 Our work has identified the charging structure as the single biggest impediment to efficiency in the lettings arrangements. We would welcome scrutiny comments as we work up our proposals to change the charging arrangements. Subject to appropriate approvals we aim to complete that task by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014, and we will pilot this approach in selected locations from Easter 2014. We believe a lead in period would be helpful, to give existing users notice, and avoiding making changes over the summer when activities are at a peak will avoid disruption.

### **3.4 Pricing - How much does it cost to use a community centre?**

3.4.1 The key question any casual user or long term tenant would like the Council to answer. We have put a set of arrangements which mean that there are over 100 answers to that question, often related to the type of activity which the hirer intends to run.

3.4.2 This complexity is the key impediment to efficient working of the lettings arrangement. This leads to complex administration, including a 6 page form to effect a letting.

3.4.3 The delegation of the community centres to area committees in part contributes to these problems as the present arrangements ask members to set prices in their local areas. In considering these decisions there is no monitoring or understanding of the effect these decisions make on the sustainability of the service, or income generated.

3.4.4 There is a great pressure on members to provide accommodation in centres for free. In reality free is similar to a grant to the user in the form of income forgone. However with the exception of the Rental subsidy scheme – where the 16 biggest users of the centres justify their subsidy, the council does not subject the free use to the degree of scrutiny which would be applied to other regimes where grants are given. The service has a significant target for increased income. This cannot be met without charging in many cases.

### **3.5 The proposed option**

3.5.1 It is proposed that two or three price points could be set for each space available, reflecting the facilities on offer.

- Point 1 – Full economic cost or 'Market Rent'
- Point 2 – reduced community group rate
- Point 3 – Free

3.5.2 It is proposed that separate arrangements are developed for the venues in the portfolio (Blackburn Hall, Morley Town Hall, Yeadon Town Hall) reflecting the different activity which takes place in these buildings, compared to standard community centres.

3.5.3 It is suggested Area Committees will retain a role in considering prices at points 2 and 3

3.5.4 It is proposed to simplify the lettings process by:

- Separating venues and community centres so that appropriate information is collected;
- Utilise the option to pay in advance by credit/debit card;
- Consider on balance whether all the information currently collected is necessary, with a view to simplifying the process.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2 There are no specific Equality and diversity considerations in this paper, however as decisions about the portfolio are made we will give due regard to Equality and Diversity

## **5 Conclusions**

5.1 Members are invited to comment on the contents of this report, and give views on the proposals.