



Discussion Paper:

Making the most of local assets and ensuring community influence

Background

The Inner North West has a wide variety of community centres and facilities run by the council, voluntary sector and faith groups. Over the past few years, most centres will have faced economic challenges as funding streams have changed and organisations that book space cut back on services.

The Inner North West area is an interesting case study on how the different models of community centres are meeting these challenges. The purpose of this discussion will be to learn how centres have adapted and found new income streams, what challenges remain, what lessons can be learned, and perhaps most importantly, how centres are connecting with their local communities and offering services that meet their needs.

Community Centres by Ward

1) Headingley

Headingley Ward has two main community centres, Headingley Arts and Enterprise Centre and the Cardigan Centre. The ward also has some well used church halls and the Left Bank Centre, an arts venue.

Cardigan Centre

The Cardigan Centre is on the boarder of Hyde Park and Headingley wards and has been operating for more than 20 years. Today it has a mixed offer including activities and clubs, a youth service commissioned by the council, a citywide learning offer and a social enterprise offering admin support to local businesses and groups.

HEART

The HEART centre opened in 2011 in a former school building following a lengthy campaign and fundraising effort by local residents. It is an award winning facility offering a café, a range of rooms to hire and an enterprise centre providing a touchdown space for small businesses. Most of the activities are run by external organisations and include a community choir, support groups, a food bank and pilates.

2) Hyde Park

Hyde Park has four community centres, spread across the ward. In recent years two council run centres, Woodhouse and Woodsley Road were taken over by community led organisations and are now managed independently.

Burley Lodge Centre

The Burley Lodge Centre is run by the charity Better Leeds Communities and is located in the heart of one of the ward's most deprived neighbourhoods. It offers advice, guidance and support services for the local community as well as youth provision commissioned by the council. They have experienced impressive growth over the years, winning citywide contracts for debt and welfare advice services and children's play. They continue to deliver services for the local community including community development and organising, health and wellbeing activities such as swimming lessons for children and cookery classes.

Little London Community Centre

Little London is one of only two centres in the Inner North West managed by the council. The local charity CALLS has a permanent base at the centre and use it for a variety of activities, primarily around health and community cohesion. Space at the centre is limited and inflexible which affects the range of bookings that can be taken. To support the PFI housing scheme, a brand new community centre will be built, and work is underway to consult with local residents and partner agencies on its future use.

Woodhouse Community Centre

Woodhouse Community Centre was transferred from council ownership to a community led partnership supported by local charity OBLONG three years ago. It is also home to the local neighbourhood network, Caring Together in Little London and Woodhouse. Oblong run some of their own activities from the centre including a range of volunteer led activities, including community gardening, basic IT classes, ESOL and Little Rascals street dance. The centre has various rooms and offices to let, and a number of permanent bookings including a church group on Sunday.

Woodsley Road Community Centre

Woodsley Road Community Centre is another centre that was transferred from the council to a community led organisation. It is a large centre predominantly used by the local Asian community as it provides a range of services sympathetic to cultural needs such as women only classes and a bereavement and funeral service for the local Muslim community. The centre is also home to the Leeds Kashmiri Elders as well as a range of employability and health activities open to all. It hosts a number of activities, mostly through external providers, including a youth club, homework club, older people's social groups and exercise classes.

3) Weetwood

Weetwood has just one formal community centre, although there are a number of church halls that are widely used for community activities. There is a lack of bookable community space north of the ring road, and plans to expand services at the St Vincent Community Hub are welcome.

Meanwood Community Centre

Meanwood Community Centre is actually within the Weetwood ward boundary but as its name suggests, it serves mainly residents from that ward. It is a busy centre with a range of leisure activities run by external organisations including Zumba, tea dance, yoga and art

classes. The centre hires permanent office space to two organisations, including a church group which also books the centre on Sundays for worship.

St Vincent's Community Hub

The St Vincent's charity shop on Silk Mill Drive runs a 'community hub' from a former retail space next door. It has been open for some time and is used for youth clubs and social activities. It does not have internet access which limits the services that can be provided, particularly around job search and adult education.

Challenges & Opportunities

Over recent years, independent and council run community centres across the city have faced significant financial pressures as grant opportunities have become more competitive and cuts in public and voluntary sector budgets have affected the capacity of some organisations to run activities and pay booking fees.

Expectations of users and hirers have evolved, with many looking for a more modern, comfortable facility with good IT and internet access. In some areas, the needs of the local community have changed with more people seeking advice and employability services and increasing Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority populations who may have language or cultural barriers to accessing the services centres offer.

Over the past few years, people are increasingly using the internet and social media to find out what is happening in the local area, and they are unlikely to read a poster or walk into a centre on spec. Whilst some centres have embraced these new marketing opportunities, others have struggled to create and maintain an online presence.

Despite the financial pressures and changing communities, there are centres that are adapting and flourishing. The purpose of the discussion at the Community Committee is to investigate the challenges facing the community centres of the inner North West and discover lessons that can be shared to improve their sustainability and ensure that the new centre at Little London is a success.

Introduction to the discussion

Three representatives from local community centres have been asked to speak on some of the key issues around running a successful community centre.

- 1) John McKenzie – Cardigan Centre: Running a centre that is outward facing and responsive to community need
- 2) Qari Qasim – Woodsley Road Community Centre: Challenges and lessons learned about running a new centre
- 3) Richard Norton – HEART Centre: Marketing the centre

Discussion questions

In mixed ward groups, consider the following questions and make recommendations of key issues to take forward for further investigation.

- 1) What are the key things that centres need to focus on to improve their sustainability?**

- 2) How do centres involve the local community and understand what services can be delivered that meet their needs?**

- 3) How can centres work collaboratively to share best practice and maximise scarce resources?**