



Cabinet 23 November 2011

Community Centres

1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.1 In early 2010 the Borough Council circulated a leaflet informing all interested parties that it wished to transfer community centres to suitably constituted community groups or other public bodies committed to providing local community facilities.
- 1.2 A number of the existing community associations, although already successfully running their centres, indicated that they did not yet feel ready to take on the complete responsibility for their centre, including external maintenance. However in Southgate, Bury St Edmunds there was interest both from the existing Community Association and from Southgate Church. The two organisations came together to form a new group, the Southgate Community Partnership. On 30 September 2011 the Council completed the transfer of the centre, at nil value, to the new group as it had met all the expectations which the Borough Council had set for groups to which a centre might be transferred (see Report B203, presented to the Cabinet on 15 September 2010, for the full Expectations Document).
- 1.3 The Borough Council is the first in England to undertake a full freehold transfer of this type (the only other examples of freehold transfers are in Scotland), which is a huge vote of confidence in the local community involved. It gives the community the ability to use the centre as collateral to help them develop the building and the activities delivered from it. The governance and charitable objects of the new group ensure the asset is preserved for the benefit of the local community in perpetuity (by way of an "asset lock", which ensures that the assets and any income of the new body are dedicated to its charitable purposes).
- 1.4 The Borough Council now wishes to use the learning from this first transfer and open up this opportunity to the communities of the other centres. The Southgate Community Partnership has indicated their willingness to share their experiences with others, which should assist in this process.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Cabinet agree a timeframe for work towards transfer of the remaining community centres. Two options for the timeframe are outlined in paragraphs 4.6 and at 4.8 (this recommendation arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's consideration of this issue).

3. Corporate Objectives

3.1 The recommendation meets the following, as contained within the Corporate Plan:-

- (a) Corporate Priority : *'Improving the safety and well-being of the community'; and*
- (b) Cabinet Commitments : *'Provide a strong voice for west Suffolk: encourage and support communities across West Suffolk through effective community engagement to shape and deliver their local services, taking into account the Government's localism agenda'.*
- (c) Vision 2025 : *St Edmundsbury will be a place which: Leisure and Culture - Where all residents live within walking distance of recreational and countryside activities.*

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4. Key Issues

- 4.1 In order to move forward with the transfer of other centres it is necessary to put a timeframe to the work to encourage local communities to engage in the process. That timeframe needs to allow time for the development of areas of expertise which individual groups may feel they lack, and for the necessary governance and procedures to be put in place to satisfy the requirements of the Borough Council's Expectations Document of September 2010. While allowing time for the work to take place the setting of a timeframe gives a clear expectation that progress should be made.
- 4.2 For the Leiston Centre in Haverhill and the Newbury and Westbury Centres in Bury St Edmunds the Borough Council's first point of enquiry is with the existing three community associations as they currently run the premises. However, this does not preclude consideration of other partners who might wish to play a role, such as a town council or other community based groups. However, if an external group came forward with an interest in a centre which had a community association the Borough Council would look to bring the groups together to see if a partnership approach was possible, as happened at the Southgate Centre.
- 4.3 The Borough Council would also wish to see the wider community in the area of a centre involved in considering the future of the centre, for example via the conduct of a community survey to establish what local residents want from their centre and whether they are prepared to be involved in the centre.
- 4.4 The Chalkstone Community Centre has not benefited from a community association, and attempts to form a user group and engage the local residents association has revealed little appetite to create one. As a result the Borough Council meets the caretaking, cleaning and booking and invoicing requirements of the centre. This means there are staffing issues to consider as the cleaning and caretaking of the centre forms part of the facilities management contract with Ocean, so transfer of undertakings (Transfer of Undertakings Protection of Employment (TUPE)) issues have to be considered. Whilst this does not prevent a completely new model of operation from being considered it does mean that the Borough Council might need to meet costs associated with the change in the contract in order to free a community group up to take on the centre.
- 4.5 The Haverhill Town Council has also renewed its interest in the centre and officers will explore this further. A report will be brought to the Cabinet outlining options for moving forward as soon as both the community group and Town Council have firmed up their proposals.
- 4.6 The provisional timetable for transfer of the other centres which officers originally proposed is:

Centre	Period of preparatory work	Target transfer window
Westbury	2012/13	April-September 2013
Leiston	2013/14	April-September 2014
Newbury	2014/15	April-September 2015

- 4.7 The timeframe recognises that the Newbury Community Association has previously registered its concern that it lacks the skills to take on the full responsibility for the centre, although it has run it as a local facility which has a strong local following for many years. Providing a timeframe gives the necessary focus for the kind of engagement the Associations and the Borough Council need to have to work through the transfer process. It also takes account of the capacity available within the Borough Council and in the external bodies with whom the Council would seek to work, such as Locality and Suffolk Pro-Help.

4.8 Cabinet will be aware that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked to receive a report on Community Centres at its meeting on 12 October 2011. As a result of the discussion the Committee wished to see an accelerated timetable. A copy of the report from the Committee is attached as Appendix 1 to this paper for ease of reference. The recommendation from the Committee is:-

That two community centres be prioritised to transfer to community ownership with a target date in 2013, with the remaining two transfers being subject to a completion date in 2014.

5. Other Options considered

5.1 The Borough Council has detailed its key requirements of any group taking on a centre in its Expectations Document of September 2010. However, as it has not been prescriptive about the way in which those expectations will be met it leaves the way open for a variety of different approaches to the transfer of individual centres depending on local circumstances.

5.2 The option of continuing to finance the centres is not considered tenable. The Borough Council cannot access the external funding streams which are available for community groups to bid for for the upkeep and enhancement of community facilities. The move to transfer centres is also in line with the thinking of the previous and current Government that community facilities are best run by local people who have a direct interest in their success, are attuned to what the local community want and can be more adaptable and flexible in the way they achieve that. This is already the model adopted for all rural village halls and community centres, and several in our two towns.

6. Community impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and diversity issues)*

6.1 General

6.1.1 As the rationale for looking at the transfer of the centres is to maintain them and give local people the flexibility to develop them in new and different ways so as a minimum there should be no adverse community impact. Experience elsewhere, both at the Southgate and Anselm Centres in Bury St Edmunds and at other community owned facilities around the country, is that a successful transfer results in much stronger community involvement in the centres and provides local people with a variety of new opportunities to develop skills which they can transfer to other aspects of their lives.

6.2 Diversity and Equality Impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 It is a prerequisite of any transfer that the body taking on the asset should have a strong commitment to equality and diversity. This is made explicit in the Expectations Document of September 2010. In addition, the Borough Council has carried out an Equality Impact Assessment of the transfer process. A community survey to establish what local people want from their community facilities and whether/how they would use them would potentially help to increase the diversity of community centre users.

7. Sustainability Impact *(including environmental or social impact on the local area or beyond the Borough)*

7.1 As outlined at 6.1.1 it is anticipated that a successful transfer will have a beneficial impact on the local community. The aims, objectives and constitution of any organisation taking on a centre will be thoroughly scrutinised to ensure that the interests of the local community are at the heart of the new organisation. The aim in transferring centres is to see them secured as community facilities in perpetuity.

- 8. Consultation**
- 8.1 When the interest of the Borough Council in transferring the centres to local communities was explored in early January 2010 a leaflet explaining what a transfer involved was widely circulated to voluntary and community groups, including all the existing community associations, local churches, headteachers and school governors and other voluntary groups.
- 8.2 In the lead up to this report officers have met with all but one of the Ward Members for each of the four centres and are in the process of attending meetings of the community associations.
- 8.3 In Haverhill the Ward Member briefing was done as one meeting and the intention is for the Ward Members to work together as a group to share learning and ideas, albeit that some of the detail of arrangements for the two centres will be different.

- 9. Resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*
- 9.1 The main resource needed is officer time as it takes time to build the trust and working relationships with a group to help support it to work towards a transfer.
- 9.2 Experience with the Southgate transfer suggests that during the negotiations for transfer there will be some use of the planned maintenance budget to ensure that the building is transferred in good order, but this will be contained within the existing budget.
- 9.3 The bigger resource could be the implications of the community group interest in Chalkstone Community Centre. As indicated at paragraph 4.4, officers are working to understand the financial implications of a community group taking on the centre to run under a new model which does not perpetuate current staffing arrangements. It may be that there is a financial investment needed to create the space for such a community based solution.
- 9.4 It may also be that the Haverhill Town Council, which has recently expressed a renewed interest in the Chalkstone Centre, wishes to put a proposition to the Borough Council for the transfer of the centre.
- 9.5 The Borough Council's current commitment of resources to the centres is detailed at Appendix 2.

10. Risk Assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

10.1

Risk area	Inherent level of Risk (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk (after controls)
	High/Medium/Low		High/Medium/Low
Potential alienation of sections of the community as a result of the proposal to look at transfer.	Medium	Early and wide consultation. Holding face to face meetings. Provision of a myth-buster sheet to tackle unfounded rumours. Long term commitment to work with community associations. Using the learning from the successful transfer of the Southgate Centre and continuing to involve Locality to give groups independent support in the	Low

		transfer process.	
That any transfers are unsuccessful.	Medium	Initial transfer successfully completed and a broad template for the process developed. Sufficient time invested in working with the groups to ensure they can develop realistic business plans which will sustain the centre financially into the future.	Low
That the timetable for transfer is delayed by capacity issues or concerns which need to be resolved.	Medium	Each transfer will be unique, reflecting the local circumstances of the centre and the local community. Each will work at their own pace, and time needs to be allowed to work through issues and build confidence so that any transfer is resilient.	Medium

11. Legal or policy implications

11.1 The Borough Council has already established the policy framework for the transfer of Community Centres when full Council endorsed the Expectations Document of September 2010. As each individual centre comes forward for transfer the individual Heads of Terms for that centre will be drafted.

Wards affected	Minden, St Olaves, Haverhill East, Haverhill South	Portfolio Holder	Tourism and Community Services
Background Papers	Cabinet reports B12, B203 and B507, Community Centre Transfer Leaflet February 2010 and report C173 to Overview and Scrutiny October 2011	Subject Area Corporate Plans and Strategies	



Cabinet

23 November 2011

Community Centres: Recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. On 12 October 2011 the Committee considered Report C173.
2. The report on community centres which appears on this agenda first came to the attention of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when discussing the Forward Plan at its meeting on 7 September 2011. The Committee requested that a report be brought to its October 2011 meeting setting out levels of subsidy and maintenance; the timetable for transfer of those centres still managed by the Borough Council; and an analysis of Trustees and the legal obligations in this respect.
3. The report to the Committee set out levels of subsidy and maintenance, showing the sums provided to support the four community centres which were run by local community associations (Leiston, Newbury, Westbury and Southgate), and it was reported that the transfer of Southgate Community Centre had now been completed. Two other Council-owned community centres were also mentioned, which operated on a different model to that of the four centres detailed (Moreton Hall and Chalkstone), and Appendix 1 to the Committee report provided details of the maintenance costs incurred by the Council across the various centres.
4. A draft timetable for the transfer of Wesbury, Leiston and Newbury Community Centres was provided and discussed, together with the legal requirement to have Trustees. Finally, the Expectations Document for the transfer of Council-owned community centres to community ownership was provided.
5. The Committee discussed the information provided and questioned why there was such a long run-in planned to the transfer of further community centres. Whilst Members accepted that time was needed to engage sensitively with community associations, and that significant officer resource may be required to achieve any transfers, they felt that at least one of the community centres concerned was in a good position to be transferred, and that therefore transfers should be pursued on an earlier timescale. The Committee concluded that there should be a target set to transfer two community centres in 2013 and the other two in 2014, although a decision on which community centres should be transferred in each year would be left to the Cabinet.

6. The Committee **recommend: that two community centres be prioritised for transfer to community ownership with a target completion date in 2013, with the remaining two transfers being subject to a completion date in 2014.**

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Community Centres Current costs: rent, cleaning, maintenance and renewables

2011/2012			
Community Centres	Rent	Cleaning etc	Total
Leiston Community Centre	£5,750.00	£2,700.00	£8,450.00
Newbury Community Centre	£7,450.00	£3,555.00	£11,005.00
Westbury Community Centre	£3,450.00	£3,015.00	£6,465.00
Southgate Community Centre	NIL	NIL	NIL
Total:	£16,650.00	£9,270.00	£25,920.00

2004/2005-2010/2011			
Community Centres	Rent	Cleaning etc	Total
Leiston Community Centre	£5,750.00	£3,000.00	£8,750.00
Newbury Community Centre	£7,450.00	£3,950.00	£11,400.00
Southgate Community Centre	£8,500.00	£4,450.00	£12,950.00
Westbury Community Centre	£3,450.00	£3,350.00	£6,800.00
Total:	£25,150.00	£14,750.00	£39,900.00

Chalkstone Community Centre has not benefited from a community association and is the only centre actually run by the council. A number of sections have an involvement in the centre. For 2011/2012 £35,250 of costs from the Ocean facilities management contract relate to the centre for caretaking and cleaning services. In addition the council maintains the building and Reception at Haverhill offices currently take the bookings and invoices. The bookings service will shortly be taken on by Ocean (at no additional cost) and invoicing will be done by the Community directorate. The Council receives £2,800 a year from the lease of the top floor of the centre to Suffolk County Council for use as the local Childrens' Centre.

Community Centre Maintenance Costs

APPENDIX 2

		2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Chalkstone	Repair and maintenance	20,000	8000	2400	10700	2300	13000	1500
	Part window replacement	15,000	-					
	Boiler replacement							11300
Clements	Repair and maintenance	8,700	11,300	8400	10500	12000	7000	3100
	Roof repair	33,100	-	-				
	Asbestos Management			4000				
	Replacement heating			16000				
Newbury	Repair and maintenance	200	700	300	115	600	400	600
	Refurbishment toilets	-	20,000					
	Refurbishment heaters and kitchen	-	15,000					
	Asbestos Management							
	DDA improvements			4800	1600			
	External paving							3700
Southgate	Repair and maintenance	15,000	2,500	1300	700	6000	1300	500
	Part replace windows and doors	-	10,500	19000			3200	4300
	Asbestos management			2500				
	Roof, drainage, rooflight replacement						202000	
Westbury	Repair and maintenance	250	3,500	200	1300	400	1500	3600
	Refurbish kitchen & toilets	-	43,000					
	DDA improvements/gents toilets			127000	3000			
	Part cladding replacement						26000	
Moreton Hall	None	-	-	-	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		92,250	114,500	185,900	27,915	21,300	254,400	28,600