

HOMES & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

7 JUNE 2021

ANNUAL REPORT COMMUNITY CENTRES GENERAL FUND REVIEW 2020/21

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of operational activities, compliance and assurance arrangements in place at the 4 General Fund Council owned community centre/village halls and to note the recommendations in the report to ensure that the operational management oversight of these assets is robust and meets the Council's assurance requirements.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Members will be aware that the Council currently owns 4 community centres/village halls, as detailed in Appendix A, which are all managed through a leasehold relationship. Over the last 10 years the Council has transferred the freehold interest of 3 other community assets, Edwinstowe Village Hall, Millgate/Pelham Street Community Centre and Coddington Community Centre to either the local parish council or in the latter case a charitable trust. The asset transfers were completed in accordance with the Council's Asset Transfer Policy – Corporate Principles (adopted in December 2008) following approval by Policy and Finance.

2.2 This policy was adopted in order to guide any future considerations regarding the transfer of community assets. The policy further ensures that the Council is able to consistently consider requests or recommendations for the transfer of assets whilst being able to treat each case on its merits in order that the Council can fulfil its strategic priorities.

2.3 Of the 4 currently owned centres, 2 are subject to transfer negotiations following approval by Policy and Finance Committee to offer the freehold ownership to the respective Parish Councils of Rainworth and Fernwood, both of which have temporarily stalled due to the implications of Covid19, however, it is hoped that negotiations will resume and be concluded shortly in order that the transfers can be completed.

2.4 In 2019 the management of the 4 council owned community centres and village halls were audited as part of the Council's internal audit programme and an action plan was agreed to improve the governance of the management arrangements in place. The purpose of the audit was to 'provide assurance that there are adequate processes in place for ensuring compliance with lease and occupiers liabilities to protect the council and its assets'.

2.5 It was noted that each centre is run independently with its own management and governance arrangements, and each management organisation has a lease or tenancy with the Council which protects its assets. Furthermore, the community facilities are recognised as both an asset, 'a facility that can enable and facilitate a positive contribution to the delivery of the Council's Community Plan objective', and a liability to the Council, 'if each facility is not well managed and there is insufficient oversight of the management arrangements'. This oversight should include a mechanism for monitoring the facilities so that all checks and communications are documented in one place. This approach will provide assurance that the facilities are adding value to the overall service offer and that the current controls that are in place are suitable and sufficient to minimise risks to the Council.

- 2.6 Whilst there is an acceptance that the tenants are independent of the Council and should be allowed to manage the assets in an appropriate way, it is appropriate that there oversight from the Council through an agreed schedule of periodic checks to maintain compliance with legal and regulatory requirements which protects the interests of all parties
- 2.7 In response to the review undertaken by Internal Audit a robust approach to the management of health and safety, statutory compliance and operating assurances is now in place and a timetable of visits will be agreed with each centre and a summary of the discussion recorded and retained for audit and assurance purposes. This will extend to a set of performance measures agreed with each centre's management organisation which will be reviewed on a regular basis and reported to Homes and Community committee annually.
- 2.8 Maintenance of the centres, both reactive repairs and proactive improvement/replacement schemes will be managed co-ordinated and recorded by Corporate Property using a database which will enable greater visibility and transparency on building related matters. This will ensure that all necessary checks are undertaken in a timely manner and that records are maintained for assurance and reference purposes.
- 2.9 Unfortunately, due to the Pandemic, the 2020-2021 overall review can offer little meaningful information about income and usage as the centres were required to close for much of the year with permitted activity being limited in most instances. This has placed a significant strain on the finances of the centres which generally rely on income generation from user groups and hirers to cover operating costs. Fortunately for the centres, financial support was made available by the Council through various mechanism including Covid support grants in order to provide income to help maintain the solvency of the centres.

3.0 Proposals

- 3.1 That committee notes the overview of operational activities, compliance and assurance arrangements currently in place at the 4 General Fund supported Council owned community centres/village halls and notes the recommendations in the report to ensure that the operational management oversight of these assets is robust and meets the Council's assurance requirements.

4.0 Equalities Implications

- 4.1 There are no detrimental equalities implications associated with this report as all centres have an equalities statement that ensures that the facility is accessible to all sections of the community in accordance with its own governance documents. Compliance with the Equality Act 2010 in respect of the 9 protected characteristics will be part of the assurance process.

5.0 Digital Implications

- 5.1 There are no significant digital implications in respect of this proposal. The gathering of assurance data will, wherever possible, be shared and stored electronically as is currently the situation in respect of statutory checks. Each of the centre leads will work closely with Council officers to ensure that there is a regular flow of information between the two organisations in accordance with the Council's digital agenda and local digital declaration.

6.0 Financial Implications FIN21-22/9741

6.1 There are no additional financial implications arising as a result of this update report. The annual revenue budget for Neighbourhood Centres is sufficient to cover the costs associated with supporting the operational requirements of the centres to monitor compliance obligations.

7.0 Community Plan – Alignment to Objectives

7.1 The services delivered through partner organisations make a significant contribution to the Council's Community Plan 2020 - 2023 objectives primarily 'create vibrant and self-sufficient local communities where residents look out for each other and actively contribute to their local area' and 'improve the health and wellbeing of local residents' through access to each centre's programme of activities which contribute to improving physical, social and psychological wellbeing.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

8.1 It is recommended to Homes and Communities Committee that:

- a) the report and Appendix A are noted; and
- b) The annual review for 2021/2022 be presented to Committee in 2022.

Reason for Recommendation(s)

To enable the Council to monitor the annual performance of its community centres/village halls to ensure that there is suitable and sufficient assurance checks in place to reduce risks to the council and to protect the Council's assets and reputation whilst enabling the facilities to make a positive contribution to the delivery of the Council's Community Plan 2020 - 2023.

Background Papers

Nil

For further information please contact Andy Hardy – Health Improvement and Community Relations Manager on Ext 5708

Suzanne Shead
Director – Housing, Health and Wellbeing

Overview of Current Community Centres and Village Halls

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| Centre | Bridge Community Centre |
| Year Built | 1978 |
| Management Body | Bridge Community Association |
| Status | Charitable Trust Reg No. 509315 |
| Purpose | Education/training/advancement of health or saving of lives/religious activities/arts/culture/heritage/science/amateur sport/economic community development/employment – provides human resources/buildings/facilities/open space |
| Lease Details | 99 years from 5/12/79 |
| Overall Summary | <p>In the last year we have seen a drop from being able to confidently pay all our own bills through the rental of our hall to 36 registered groups and an average footfall of 850 people per week to 0 income and footfall.</p> <p>The gap in lockdowns did help slightly but our biggest groups where we see main income could not restart only 5 groups were able to run and 3 of those were community ventures so are not charged and run off donations. Thankfully, our utility bills showed a reduction due to a decrease in usage and grants were made available which have saved us from certain closure.</p> <p>We hope to reintroduce our community groups and rented groups over the next 2 months and be back to “normal” by August 2022.</p> |

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| Centre | Fernwood Village Hall |
| Year Built | 2008 |
| Management Body | Fernwood Parish Council |
| Status | Parish Council |
| Purpose | Village hall provision to provide a place for local community groups to meet and engage in various community based activities. |
| Lease Details | 40 years from 22/09/08 |
| Overall Summary | <p>The legal work between Newark and Sherwood District Council and Fernwood Parish Council has commenced and terms for the transfer of the freehold of the building are under negotiation. This has been very slow though and the Parish Council would appreciate NSDC’s assistance with completing the transaction over the next few months.</p> <p>The hall was closed due to National lockdown and restrictions for long periods but opened in a Covid secure manner as soon as was permitted. The government grant scheme has helped us get through this period and we have taken the opportunity to do lots of decorating and improving the energy efficiency of the hall with better loft installation. Our regular hirers that have returned have been great, following our risk assessment and Covid 19 special conditions to keep everyone using the building as</p> |

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| | <p>safe as possible during the pandemic. ACRE guidance has really helped us with this.</p> <p>During the lockdown we used the down time to decorate the hall and make some improvements such as improving the loft installation and installing bike racks to help with our new Environmental Policy for the hall.</p> <p>The Parish Council's strategic plan includes taking ownership of the village hall and developing this as a community hub of the Parish. We are looking into extending/adapting the hall to better meet the needs of the community and use the space more effectively. This will include consultation with the community and users of the hall.</p> <p>We thank colleagues at NSDC for all their support'.</p> |
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| Centre | Rainworth Village Hall |
| Year Built | 1936 |
| Management Body | Rainworth Village Hall Management Committee via Rainworth PC |
| Status | Registered Charity No. 1092122 |
| Purpose | General charitable purposes/arts/culture/heritage/science/amateur sport – provides buildings/facilities/open space/services |
| Lease Details | 99 years from 11/09/92 |
| Overall Summary | <p>Use of the village hall was decimated during the last financial year due to the impacts of Covid, a majority of the hall's staff members were furloughed and a limited staffing resource retained to keep the hall functioning and compliant with health and safety requirements during the periods of lockdown.</p> <p>When the hall was able to re-open for limited group use it did so in a Covid secure way with approved safe systems of work in place following a Covid risk assessment. Due to the type of bookings that the hall attracts income levels were severely impacted and without grant support from Gov't Covid grants, and financial support from Newark and Sherwood District Council and Rainworth Parish Council the hall would have closed.</p> <p>Although some costs were made during the periods of lockdown and closure other costs escalated in terms of putting in place additional measures such as cleaning and PPE and upgrades to meet the compliance requirements. Progress with the proposed transfer was pause during the pandemic and needs to be revisited when the current situation improves to a point where the hall can resume its community purpose.</p> |

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| Centre | Hawtonville Community Centre |
| Year Built | 1982 |
| Management Body | Reach Learning Disability and Company Limited by Guarantee |
| Status | Registered Charity No. 1076318 and Registration No. 3724275 |
| Purpose | Support and services to people with learning disabilities and their families to achieve a good life in their community by providing care support within a 50 mile radius of Southwell. |
| Lease Details | 15 years from 1 April 2021 |
| Overall Summary | <p>Due to COVID external hires were limited for this period. Our Day Service provision ceased between 23rd March – September 2020, however, we risk assessed individuals where placements with family/carers were at risk of breaking down and/or had no internet access so could not access our alternative delivery were allowed to access the centre as part of an alternative delivery plan.</p> <p>From September onwards we have gradually increased capacity and liaised with external hirers to work in line with the latest Government road map, hiring the centre after the 12th April again to the two regular bookings. We now have had some interest in new hires and have some bookings in place for 2021.</p> <p>Our first-floor hire will cease in June as Reach Care are moving to larger premises and Reach Learning Disability will expand its office accommodation and use the first floor offices. To mitigate for the reduction in oncome from the hire of the first floor offices wider community use will be encouraged and new groups attracted particularly in relation to children’s birthday parties and small community events.</p> <p>Operating costs have remained largely the same, if not increased due to the amount of cleaning products required as well as additional PPE, however, the grant support received from N&SDC was gratefully received.</p> <p>During COVID and lockdown we worked with a local baker and offered the use of the centre as the local community pick up point for families of school children who would ordinary be in receipt of a free school meal.</p> |