

Committee:	Tenants 'and Leaseholders' Consultative Forum
Date:	11 November 2008
Subject:	INFORMATION REPORT – Community Centre Review
Responsible Officer:	Gwyneth Allen Divisional Director Adults and Housing
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Barry Macleod-Cullinane Portfolio Holder Adult and Housing Services
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary

FOR INFORMATION

Update report on review of the 10 Housing Revenue Account owned Community Centres.

Section 2 – Report

2.1 Introduction

2.2 The Housing Service owns 10 community centres. This means that the assets are Housing Revenue Account (HRA) assets as opposed to General Fund assets. The centres are located across the borough and vary in size and condition. All centres are Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant. A voluntary sector organisation has exclusive access to one of the Centres and it is expected that from the 1 April, 2008 the HRA will receive market rent for the premises. Three centres provide accommodation for pre school nurseries. All centres have capacity for further use.

2.3 Background

2.3.1 The Audit Commission inspection of the Housing Service in November 2003 included in its recommendations the statement that ‘the council should continue to drive through the plans for successful use of the housing HRA community halls’

2.3.2 In June 2006 a project initiation document was produced to undertake a review of the community centres. The review sought information on the following:

- The number and type of community centres the Housing Department has
- Location and stock condition of all the community buildings
- The value of these assets
- The level of financial support and other resources provided to run and develop these assets
- The current and future liabilities, governance, levels of use and ways of utilising these valuable assets better
- The needs of tenants, leaseholders, residents and community groups
- The effectiveness of current management arrangements
- How many of the buildings are Disability Discrimination Act compliant
- The current cost effectiveness of the available assets
- The degree of under usage, lack of provision and over provision of facilities
- A comparison of practices in Harrow with a number of similar local authorities
- The principles and rationale behind the current rent setting and leasing arrangements
- The health and safety implications of managing tenants' facilities
- Identification and evaluation new governance arrangements drawing on best practice from other authorities e.g. management/committee arrangements

2.4 Progress

2.4.1 A progress report was presented to the Tenant and Leaseholder Consultative Forum on the 29 October 2007. That report explained that, it has taken time to conclude the review as the thinking in relation to the possibilities for the Centres has developed as the review progressed.

2.4.2 Full details of each premises has been collated and all centres have been inspected. The housing service has become aware of development work taking place in other Council departments in relation to community premises and the charging and management structures for those buildings, which has influenced the HRA community centre review.

2.4.3. The development of three Neighbourhood Resource Centres, Millmans Day Centre, and the Children's Centres and the opening up of school premises to the wider community offer a much bigger pool of buildings for use by residents and also reduces the demand for use of the HRA owned community centres.

2.5 The bigger picture

2.5.1. The Local Government Act 2000 encouraged local authorities to promote economic, social and environmental well being and set out a role for local authorities in community leadership. In part this involves integrating and joining up the work of various agencies at a local level, usually within the framework of a Local Strategic Partnership. Building strong relationships with community groups can help local authorities to fulfil this role.

2.6 Short term issues

2.6.1 Stock condition

2.6.2 Ridge has been commissioned to undertake a stock condition survey of each of the 10 centres. All surveys are due to be completed by the end of October 2008. The surveys are comprehensive and will enable the Housing Service to develop a planned programme of maintenance and improvements required over the next 5 years. Interim information received suggests that significant capital investment is required to bring the centres up to standard.

2.6.3 Leases

2.6.4 Methuen Road Hall is let exclusively to Flash Musicals (FM). Over the past two years there have been extensive negotiations with Flash Musicals in an attempt to move them on to a short term lease whereby they pay market rent for the use of the building. On the 1 April 2008 FM were issued with a lease. FM has yet to sign the lease. David Felgate – Portfolio Surveyor is leading the negotiations.

2.6.5 Leases for nurseries operating within Churchill Place, Northolt Road and Stonegrove Gardens have been issued to the tenants and those leases will

charge market rent for use of those premises. The drafted lease allows local Tenants and Resident Associations use of the space. Final negotiations with all three nurseries are taking place.

2.6.6 Charging

2.6.7 The financial regulations in relation to the management of the HRA make it difficult for HRA Community Centres to be made available to voluntary bodies and others at concessionary rates. The buildings are old and in need of repair and it is therefore difficult to adopt a standard charging regime in line with other departments of Harrow Council.

2.6.8 Management of centres

2.6.9 Management and marketing of the centres is the responsibility of the Senior Professional Community and Investment. Recruitment to this post has been slow.

2.6.10 Currently the Housing Service does not publicise the availability of the Centres and there is not sufficient information on the housing website to facilitate access. Many of the Centres are situated in densely populated areas of housing estates making them unsuitable venues for hire for events that continue late into night or are particularly noisy.

2.7 Long term issues

2.7.1 Service Development

2.7.2 Last year Harrow Council produced The Community Development Strategy, which will contribute to the Council's strategic vision to create a **cosmopolitan**, **confident** and **cohesive** Harrow.

2.7.3 The Community Development Strategy (CDS) aims to establish a framework for cross-sector community development and projects that ensure the needs of Harrow's diverse community are a fundamental element of service delivery. In partnership with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) and other agencies, it is intended to focus on how the skills, awareness, knowledge and experience of the community, can be harnessed and utilised in order to build a stronger foundation for community development and cohesion in the borough.

2.7.4 The Head of Community Development (CD) has approached the Housing Service with a proposal to use the Housing owned centres to assist in the delivery of the action plan attached to the strategy.

2.7.5 During the summer Community Development organised the Community Connects programme which used various housing community centres as venues. Officers from CD also worked with Housing Services to publicise the events and local TRA's to ensure that tenants and leaseholders were invited to participate.

2.7.6 The Head of Sports and Cultural Services is currently undertaking a review of Harrow Arts Centre. This centre is consistently over subscribed and the Housing Service has been presented with a proposal to introduce a central booking service so that the overspill from the Arts Centre could be accommodated in the HRA owned community centres. These proposals are now being lead by Director of Business Transformation and Customer Services who has begun to investigate the feasibility of introducing a Council wide booking service.

2.7.7 The move toward more effective asset management by the Council provides the opportunity to ensure improved access to HRA owned community centres and ensure that the Housing Service is consistent in promoting access to council owned buildings.

2.8 Consultation

2.8.1 A questionnaire on the use of community centres has been sent to the Council's Resident Panel and the summary report has been received. 91% of respondents have never hired a community centre. A majority of respondents did not know that the Council has community halls for hire and feel that Council tenants and their representatives should be given priority use of the centres.

2.9 Financial issues

2.9.1 The budget for community centre expenditure for 2008/09 is £64,034 and income projection is £23,000.

2.9.2

At this stage development costs have yet to be identified. The impact of either capital or revenue costs associated with the future of these premises would need to be considered as part of the budget setting process for the HRA.

2.10 Redevelopment Opportunities

2.10.1 Major concerns listed in the Housing Strategy (HS) include; increase supply of affordable housing, make best use and improve condition of housing stock, satisfy the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents and deliver VFM. Two of the core objectives included in the HS are; improve neighbourhoods and quality of life and increase supply of affordable housing.

2.10.2 Included in the current Local Area Agreement is a target to deliver 200 new affordable homes. The Affordable Housing Delivery Group, a multi agency forum, has been set up to oversee the delivery against this target and contingency plan for risks related to delivery.

3. Equalities Issues

3.1 A recent report produced by Capital Ambitions revealed that Harrow has a high Inequality score i.e. as measured between most and least deprived super output areas in borough– 3rd highest in London and 75th in England and it also found that there are pockets of concentrated disadvantage rather than wider areas of deprivation.

3.2 Central Government has increased expectations that local authorities take the lead in Place Shaping through Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement and there is a greater expectation actions by the local authority will have real impact on lives of citizens and improve quality of life.

3.3 The options contained in this paper attempt to demonstrate that housing service are participating with other Council departments in addressing key issues to make a difference.

3.4 The proposals contained in this report address the following corporate priorities:

- Improve support for vulnerable people
- Build stronger communities

4. Conclusions

4.1 The centres are running at a loss, many are unused and are in need of significant capital investment.

4.2 The development of the Neighbourhood Resource Centres and other community building will, over time, reduce the demand on the centres.

4.3 Available funds to maintain and repair community centres are limited due to pressures within the repairs budget.

4.4 Elsewhere on this agenda two reports are relative to the issues of the community centres:

- Repairs Budget
- Review of Garage Sites

4.5 Both of these reports along with this set out broadly the problems faced within the HRA and a realisation that there is a need to find solutions that enable us to meet the need of communities and achieve increased supply of housing.

4.6 Some of the community centre sites could present redevelopment opportunities that would both offer the development of affordable housing and the re-provision of a community centre.

4.7 Feasibility studies would need to be undertaken and would need to take account of the current financial situation.

Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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