

**ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER FOR
SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS**

1.	Meeting:-	Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods
2.	Date:-	7th April, 2014
3.	Title:-	Review of Neighbourhood Centres- Phase One
4.	Directorate:-	Neighbourhoods & Adult Services

5. Summary

On the 22nd April 2013, Min No: 77 refers, the Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods received a report which detailed findings arising from the initial review of the 60 neighbourhood centres.

It was agreed that further customer and ward member consultation take place with regard to all centres to determine the final recommendations relating to future use.

This report details the outcome of the consultation exercise and review findings to date including final recommendations for the majority of centres.

Recommendations for Phase Two including remaining centres and other communal facilities will be submitted to a future meeting.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet Member;

- **Supports the retention of 37 centres as identified in Appendix 1**
- **Notes the proposed next steps identified in 7.4**

7. Proposals and Details

7.1. Background

A review of 60 neighbourhood centres located throughout the borough was initiated following customer requests in relation to the potential to opt out of the mandatory communal facility charge (CFC) and declining usage of neighbourhood centres by residents.

In addition, increasing management costs due to rises in utility costs and repairs and maintenance requirements, has resulted in the centres operating at an overall financial deficit and consequently creating budgetary pressures.

A consultation exercise for each of the neighbourhood centres, including communal lounge areas, guest bedrooms and laundry facilities has been undertaken, to determine proposals relating to future use.

This exercise, together with a desk top analysis of each centre, has enabled recommendations to be finalised for the majority of centres. However further work is currently being undertaken in relation to the remaining centres.

The review findings to date highlight that the use of centres, revenue expenditure and demand for each centre varies significantly. Further information is detailed in Appendix 1.

The exercise has also identified that there are a number of properties located within the boundary of a neighbourhood centre, which are not subject to the communal facilities charge. This is causing complaints and confusion amongst tenants which has been strongly conveyed at consultation meetings.

The Audit and Asset Management Service is undertaking a separate review of RMBC community buildings. This work is being aligned with the neighbourhood centres review, to further develop and support final recommendations.

This report does not provide findings or recommendations on other communal facilities, such as guest bedrooms and laundry facilities, as they require further consideration. The review of these facilities will be reported to a future meeting together with final recommendations for the remaining 23 centres and proposals to address issues identified with the communal facility charge.

7.2. Consultation

A thorough consultation exercise with Ward Members, tenants and community groups has now been completed that has enabled recommendations for communal facilities in 62% of centres to be finalised. This consultation exercise included:

- Sending postal surveys to all tenants with follow up calls to non-respondents - 2333 tenant surveys were sent and 1658 completed surveys were received. Overall a 71% response rate.
- Seeking feedback from Ward Members
- Holding meetings with TARA's & Community Groups where applicable - 10 Community groups and TARA's who utilise the centres have been consulted via letter; 6 have responded to highlight their support for retention of the identified centres.

- Holding open meetings at Centres with tenants and Ward Members where centres were identified as unsustainable based on usage, survey results and Ward Member feedback.

7.3 Recommendations

Based on a range of parameters including usage, financial information, Ward Member feedback and consultation responses from tenants, it is recommended that 37 of the 60 centres (62%) are retained as they are considered to be sustainable. Further information including consultation results, financial information and usage of these centres is detailed in Appendix 1.

The consultation process highlighted that the identified centres are well used and provide facilities offering many benefits to aged persons and local communities, such as reducing social isolation and maintaining independence by allowing them to participate and socialise through the provision of activities.

Links have been established with Age UK Rotherham and Rotherfed to support increased activity provision in these centres which will improve their sustainability.

We are also working with the Audit and Asset Management Service to offer potential use of neighbourhood centres to host community and voluntary sector activity, which may be displaced following the review of community buildings.

The remaining 23 centres are currently considered to be unsustainable. Further work is being undertaken to stimulate usage or consider options for future use, prior to finalising recommendations on these.

7.4 Next Steps

Subject to approval by Cabinet Member, the following steps are proposed;

- 1 Ward members to be notified of the centres within their ward which are to be retained.
- 2 Write to tenants residing in centres identified for retention with details of the decision.
- 3 Further review the remaining 23 communal facilities, undertake further work in relation to laundry and guest bedroom facilities across all centres to enable recommendations to be finalised.
- 4 Identify options to address the issues identified with the communal facility charging arrangements.
- 5 Submit final recommendations to Cabinet Member and Cabinet in June/July.

8. Finance

All 60 centres have previously operated at a surplus however there will be an overall approximate £100k budget deficit outturn in 2013/14, due to increasing energy costs and essential but unplanned repairs and maintenance costs. It is anticipated that there will be a budget deficit position in 2014/15.

Of the 37 centres, 4 centres are separate and distinct being large 'indoor' units (as identified below). These are operating at a high deficit due to heating and lighting costs throughout the building. However, an alternative use cannot be considered as

the lounge areas designed integrally to the wider communal areas/building. These are:

- Wellfield Lodge, Kimberworth Park
- Hampstead Green, Kimberworth Park
- Dawson Croft, Greasbrough
- Shaftesbury House. St Anns

The centres have received only essential and 'make good' investment for a number of years. The Strategic Housing and Investment Service are undertaking condition surveys to understand future investment liabilities. Subject to approval to retain the 37 centres, it is recommended that investment in these be prioritised, on an 'invest to save' basis, to enable management and maintenance costs to be reduced in the medium to long term. Funding has been provisionally requested from the Housing Capital Investment Programme in 2014/15 for this purpose.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The usage identified was based on a standard week's activities in each centre which therefore may increase/decrease subject to changes in occupancy.

The recommendations are based on the majority of responses from tenants however there may be a small number of tenants who may not be satisfied with the proposed recommendation.

The centres are currently operating at a deficit and there is no certainty that appropriate funding will be available to subsidise the units in future.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The proposals support the following 'Plan on a page' corporate priorities and achievements:

- Ensuring care and protection is available to those that need it the most
 - People in need of care and support have more choice and control to help them live at home
- Helping to create safe and healthy communities
 - People feel safe and happy where they live
 - More people are physically active and have a healthy way of life
 - People from different backgrounds get on well together

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Cabinet Member for Safe & Attractive Neighbourhoods – 22nd April 2014 - Neighbourhood Centres Review - Initial Recommendation

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