

Lord Mayor, Elected Councillors, and Officers of Oxford City Council.

I am one of the Trustees of the East Oxford Community Association. Until 2nd September this year we managed the East Oxford Community Centre, which has been managed by the Association for around 50 years. As you are aware, the Trustees were forcibly evicted, against their will, from this management position by Officers of Oxford City Council. At the last Full Council meeting I addressed the Council and expressed my concern at the threatening manner in which Officers of the City Council forced the Trustees to comply with their eviction plan.

Today I am addressing you to reiterate the overwhelming desire of the people of east Oxford, that the East Oxford Community Centre is managed by Trustees selected, and appointed democratically, by the people of Oxford East. There is understandable fear of having Community Centres controlled by Oxford City Council. The new leases are business based, not community orientated, leading to fears that existing tenants will be treated less sympathetically by Council management than by Association Trustees. Increased security costs and lock up fees are having to be paid by Centre hirers. There are fears that Council improvements will result in rental fees increasing to the point whereby the very people who helped create the vibrant Community Centre that EOCC is, will be forced out and statutory agencies will replace the Community groups that currently use EOCC. If this happens, EOCC will become a Statutory Community Centre rather than a Community Centre.

Despite some recent difficulties, East Oxford Community Centre has been exceptionally well managed by Trustees for well over two decades Under our management it has become a diverse and well used public space for the people of Oxford East. Since the management was taken over by the City Council we have experienced rudeness from Councillor Simm and Officers who talk to Association Trustees and other Community Centre user groups as if we are junior employees. Council employees enter our office and bar without prior notice, which is not acceptable. The reference group does not consult us about changes to the Centre. The Council is now carrying out improvements which, when we – the Association – had earlier asked for these, we were told they could not be done.

Over their years of management Trustees of the East Oxford Community Association have worked tirelessly and voluntarily, without financial reward, to manage and create a successful and vibrant Community Centre in East Oxford. The Trustees have been asked to accept, as compensation for equipment bought by them, just 100 hours of room use. After that time we will be expected to pay room hire charges for using the Centre. This is terribly unjust. There is no recognition for the 50 years of voluntary work by the Association Trustees, nor compensation offered for the time we have given.

Elected Councillors – and specifically Labour Councillors – we ask for two things today. This request is nothing to do with the existence or workings of the reference group, it is purely to do with the separate issue of management of the Centre. This is the desire of the people of Oxford East which has been demonstrated by their willingness to support the Petition put before you today, which also calls for this. We ask that the injustices shown to the Trustees are corrected, and we ask you to support our request for the management of East Oxford Community Centre to be democratically restored to the people of East Oxford

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