

To: City Executive Board

Date: 17 December 2015

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Community Centre Strategy 2015-20

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the Community Centre Strategy 2015-20

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Craig Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Christine Simm, Board Member for Culture and Communities

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the seven recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Proposed amendments for clarification from Cllr Wolff

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the Community Centre Strategy 2015-20 at its public meeting on 9 December 2015. The Committee would like to thank Ian Brooke for introducing the report and answering questions, as well as two speakers for their helpful contributions that informed the discussion. The Committee focused its discussion on the consultation process and suggestions for improving the documentation before it goes for wider consultation.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Committee heard that the Strategy aimed to knit together community centres and other community facilities into an accessible offer and that the Council would work with organisations to make community provision more sustainable. The Strategy would go out for wider consultation in the New Year for 8 weeks before returning to the City Executive Board in April 2016.

3. Councillor Wolff spoke on this item and introduced some proposed amendments to the Strategy. These included firming up the Council's commitment to dealing with the maintenance backlog and providing greater clarity about on-going financial support available to centres, and when they would be expected to be financially self-supporting. The Committee asked that these proposed amendments (included as appendix 1) are considered and where agreed, changes made before the Strategy goes out to consultation.

Recommendation 1 - That officers are asked to incorporate the clarifying amendments tabled by Councillor Wolff (see appendix 1) before the Strategy goes for wider consultation.

4. A public speaker said that the 15 minute walk time model used to map community centre catchment areas seemed arbitrary, noting that people travel to different centres to take advantage of specific facilities. The Committee heard that this was a modelling tool that did not exclude anyone from accessing other facilities. The Committee suggest that this should be clearer in the Strategy.

Recommendation 2 - That greater clarity should be provided that the 15 minute walk time used to model community centre catchment areas is not binding.

5. The Committee noted that Figure 4 (p. 9) in the Strategy shows varying levels of community facilities across the city and questioned why three specific gaps were identified in Blackbird Leys, Churchill and Marston, but not in other parts of the city that were also less well served, specifically in the North of the city. The Committee heard that population density was a factor and suggest that this should be made clearer in the Strategy.

Recommendation 3 - That clarity should be provided as to how three specific gaps in community facilities have been identified from Figure 4 in the Strategy, given that this map also shows gaps in other areas of the city.

6. The Committee questioned whether the most efficient and effective use was being made of specialist facilities at community centres, noting that a sprung floor at one facility was not being used by dance groups, for example. The Committee suggest that this aim should be included as a priority theme within the Strategy, under the Sustainable Management action area (p. 2).

Recommendation 4 - That a new priority theme should be added to the Strategy, in the Sustainable Management action area (p. 2), around making the best use and most effective use of facilities at community centres.

7. The Committee noted that the appointment of a delivery partner for a new Blackbird Leys community hub was expected in January (p. 13), and questioned what would happen in the event of slippage. The Committee heard that the Council would seek alternative sources of funding while continuing to ensure that the existing facility was well run and offered a good, inclusive programme. The Committee suggest that this 'plan b' should be set out in the Strategy.

Recommendation 5 - That the Strategy should articulate what the Council's approach will be to ensuring there is an inclusive, a high quality community hub serving the Leys area in the event that the proposed replacement of Blackbird Leys Community Centre is compromised, for example by a lack of developer funding.

8. The Committee commented that volunteers are the lifeblood of the city's community centres and suggested that there should be more recognition of their role and work in the Strategy, using more appreciative language.

Recommendation 6 - That the Strategy should better recognise and articulate the importance of volunteers to the city's community centres.

9. A speaker highlighted the importance of achieving thorough and adequate engagement during the consultation and suggested that residents associations should be listed as key stakeholders. The Committee heard that the documentation would be sent to all interested parties, which included residents associations and tenants groups but suggest that this should be made clearer.
10. The Committee noted that some focus group sessions were planned and suggest that there could be more of these, including specifically a disability focus group.
11. The Committee also noted the plan for public involvement set out in the Equalities Impact Assessment. The Committee suggest that this engagement should include representatives of each of the remaining equality strands recognised in the Equalities Act.
12. The Committee questioned whether the consultation would target engagement at individuals as well as groups and include people who do not currently use community centres but might wish to do so in future.

Recommendation 7 - That the scope of the consultation set out in the report should be widened to include:

- a) Residents associations and tenants groups as key stakeholders,
- b) That other stakeholder focus groups are considered including, as a priority, a disability focus group,
- c) Engagement with representatives of all the remaining strands recognised under the Equalities Act,
- d) Continued outreach to potential users and individuals.

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