

City Executive Board - 17 December 2015

Public Questions

Ms Judith Harley

Q: Returning The Management Of EOCC To EOCA Trustees: in the 'Sustainable Management' section of paragraph 3. of the Draft Community Centres Strategy Summary and Recommendations report, parts C and D refer, respectively, to 'Supporting Associations in developing management skills and expertise and in recruiting volunteers to run the centres' activities' and 'Supporting Associations to recruit and retain trustees and manage their buildings'.

Paragraph 3 of the proposed amendments from Cllr Dick Wolff contains a reference to the Scrutiny papers on 'Council managed centres' which starts:
"The Council's preferred position is that robust, sustainable community organisations manage the centres"

These statements and propositions are exactly what was requested for East Oxford Community Centre (EOCC) at the full Council on Monday 7th December, where a Petition requesting that the management be returned to the people of Oxford East was debated, and where one of the East Oxford Community Association (EOCA) Trustees made the same request in an address. The Petition was supported by a motion from Cllr Simmons, but was cancelled by a counter motion by Cllr Simm.

My question is: with these Community Centre Strategy statements in mind, when is the management of East Oxford Community Centre going to be restored back to the people of Oxford East, either to the Trustees of EOCA, or to a similar Community organisation?

CEB response:

The Council took over the management of the Centre because of serious allegations of mismanagement and misconduct and serious concerns about the Centre's programme expressed by staff of the Council and local Councillors. As the owner of the building and acting in trust for the wider public and community the Council was under an obligation to take action. The Council plans that it should manage the Centre directly for a period of three years, and will engage with users of the Centre and a group of interested parties on the day to day management issues and future direction of the centre during this period. Over the three years options for the redevelopment and the improvement of the Centre will be examined with the aim of providing more modern facilities. At the end of this period the Council will consult widely on future arrangements and hopes that a group of trustees could resume management of the facility. Such a group will be required to be representative, open, democratic and have a track record of productive engagement with the Council and the community.

Mr Art Well

Q: The Treatment Of Community Centre Trustees and Tenants, especially those of East Oxford Community Centre

Paragraph 8 of the Scrutiny Committee's Report (Summary and Recommendations) on the Community Centre Strategy 2015 – 2020 states:
" volunteers are the lifeblood of the City's community centres and there should be more recognition of their role and work in the Strategy, using more

appreciative language.”

This is expressed in Scrutiny's recommendation 6, “That the Strategy should better recognise and articulate the importance of volunteers to the City’s community centres.”

In the two most recent full Council meetings, one of the Trustees of the East Oxford Community Association (EOCA) has addressed Council on this very issue. At the last full Council he stated that the Trustees of EOCA “have experienced rudeness [from Councillors and Officers], and an attitude of belittlement almost of being junior employees of the Council ... EOCA have worked tirelessly and voluntarily for decades which, if put into financial terms, would have cost the council millions of pounds. We have been offered nothing to acknowledge this work done by past volunteers. The only offer is 100 free hours for fixtures, fittings and equipment (material things).”

Councillors and Officers have treated Tenants of the East Oxford Community Centre (EOCC) in a similar rude and dismissive manner.

Given that the Scrutiny Committee recommends that Community Centre volunteers should be better recognised, and their importance articulated, I have two questions for the CEB:

1. On behalf of the Council will the CEB now offer a formal apology to Trustees of EOCA, and to Tenants of EOCC, for the way they have been spoken to, and treated, by Officers and Councillors, both during the management takeover process of East Oxford Community Centre (EOCC) and since?
2. Will the CEB now offer suitable recompense to the Trustees of EOCA, which should be done in discussion with EOCA Trustees to determine what recompense they will accept as suitable, for the thousands of hours of volunteer time spent on managing EOCC over the past few decades?

CEB response:

The pre consultation Community Centre Strategy clearly addresses this - *“Most of the community centres are well managed by Community Associations, these Associations are essential for many community centres and their work is greatly valued by the Council.”*

Officer and Councillors have worked hard for a number of years with EOCC, most significantly following serious allegations about financial irregularities. The Council was left with no choice other than to directly manage the community centre as the agreed action plan for improvement was not effectively implemented. The Centre is a Council owned asset that if for the whole community and as with all public assets has to be run accordingly.

The Council has provided a space for the Association within the Centre and a number of hours of free usage.

Since the Council commenced the management of the Centre the variety and number of sessions has increased, we have put systems and procedures in place to ensure areas such a Health and Safety are suitably managed.

We strongly disagree with the statement that the Association has been belittled and that Councillors and Officers have been rude. Conversations have always been

supportive and every effort has been taken to reach fair and amicable solutions and we have spent a significant amount of time listening to the view of various members of the Association.

Over this time the Head of Service has received one formal complaint about officer conduct which was fully investigated.

Mr Nigel Gibson

Q: At the City Executive Board last December 2015, CEB ratified your decision to offer the Temple Cowley Pools site to Catalyst Housing, on the basis that you would grant planning permission for a housing development at twice the housing density permitted by your Corporate Plan, in return for a payment of £3.6m. It is quite clear that Council is anticipating this income, through its instruction to Catalyst to proceed with demolition of the Temple Cowley Pools building – if there was any doubt that planning permission would not be granted, it would make no sense to demolish the building ahead of that decision. Where in the draft budget have you included this £3.6m?

CEB response:

In setting the Councils Consultation Budget for 2016-17 and the following 3 years the Council has not taken into account any receipt from Temple Cowley Pool.

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