

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

5 JANUARY 2015 - 10.00AM



PRESENT: Councillor Mrs French (Chairman), Councillor Swan (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Broker, Mrs Bucknor, Sam Clark, Hodgson, King, Skoulding, Tierney and Tunley
ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Cornwell

OBSERVING: Councillors Clark, Murphy and Seaton.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Owen

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey (Member Services and Governance Officer), John Carey (Press Officer), Anna Goodall (Head of Legal and Governance), Dan Horn (Head of Housing and Neighbourhood Services) and Alan Pain (Corporate Director)

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

OSC25/14 COMMUNITY HOUSE

Councillor Cornwell presented the Community House report stating the following:

Following the forum meeting, two focus points were identified, one was to find an alternative funding source and the second was to look at alternative methods of service delivery. The future of the Community House should lie with a third party rather than with the Council. Most of the services offered there are not our services, but are services like skills and employment and health which are offered by other public bodies, some of these public bodies have expected us to provide this service for them. The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) have recognised and acknowledged this issue and have stepped forward to offer funding. Health related issues are dealt with at Community House and we need to ensure that they have a role to play in the future to keep the facility going.

Looking at longer term methods of delivery we are in the early stages of discussions with one or two local trusts, and work is already underway to gain interest from other parties moving forward. This longer term approach is a way forward for the district as this is not just an issue for Wisbech. If we can get something positive started in Wisbech we hope to replicate it in the other towns in the district.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Mrs French offered congratulations to Councillor Cornwell and the officers involved in securing the grant, she added that she hopes that plans are in place moving forward as we do not want to be having the same discussions in a year and is pleased to see that this work is already underway;
2. Councillor Mrs French asked for clarification with regards to a comment in a letter within the report which says that someone has been a volunteer since 2000, but her understanding was that Community House opened in 2003. Alan Pain explained that Community House started as a community programme prior to its opening in 2003 and that is why there appears to be a slight discrepancy with regards to the dates;

3. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that one of the Council's corporate objectives is to support vulnerable members of the community and to promote health and wellbeing. We have to ensure those with direct responsibilities for these services take on the service for themselves. Cambridgeshire County Council recognise that resources follow the need and this should be the focus at FDC too. Councillor Mrs French stated that in Councillor Cornwell's introduction he explained that there was a need all over Fenland;
4. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that the greatest need is in Wisbech and due to the funding cuts there is already no outreach service available in that area. She asked why the County Council had felt that a Community Interest Company (CIC) were not appropriate for supporting the work of the Community House. Councillor Cornwell confirmed that officers are looking ahead and engaging with partners, there are different organisations that have a role, we need to make them aware of that and try to get them to work together. Officers agreed to investigate the reasons that CIC were found not to be appropriate by the County Council;
5. Councillor Swan agreed that resources follow need but the issue is that we do not have the resources. We need to establish a trust at the Community House so that they can manage these issues themselves, a trust group with a representative from FDC would be able to manage themselves moving forward, or we will be looking at this again in 12 months' time. Councillor Cornwell stated that he hopes that this will be looked at in 12 months' time as moving forward there will be a lot of changes and these will have to be looked at. The DWP will not run the Community House and we will need to have a type of trust group taking responsibility for the delivery of services through the House;
6. Councillor Skoulding offered his congratulations; he asked if Wisbech Town Council are taking any responsibility for the Community House. Councillor Cornwell stated that if the services run at Community House are not the responsibility of the District Council they are probably not the responsibility of the Town Council either, but he agreed that they may be able to facilitate a trust group in some way;
7. Councillor Broker stated that moving forward there is a level of help that could come directly from the community, not financially, but in terms of time. He added that looking at the costs involved there are some jobs that local people could volunteer to do like gardening etc. Councillor Cornwell agreed and stated that in addition if a trust group was formed to take over as a non-public body there would also be some relief of the NNDR figures;
8. Councillor King asked if officers have considered the benefits of a non-premises based service. Councillor Cornwell confirmed that there are other areas that these services can be provided, but that Wisbech 2020 Vision talks of everything being centred in one place;
9. Councillor King stated that he is concerned that there are areas like Staithe Ward in Wisbech that are equally high in deprivation, we are not really addressing all the needs in the area and this has to be taken into account if we are looking at needs. Councillor Cornwell stated that ultimately we need to look across the whole of the district, and that is why my vision is to replicate this provision across Fenland. Councillor King agreed and stated that this is why he believes that we need to be looking beyond premises based service delivery;
10. Councillor King asked if specific outcomes have been measured as a result of Community House, deprivation levels have increased further in the area. It is important that we have firm evidence; we need to be able to evidence that this facility is making a difference. Alan Pain stated that we do try to measure outcomes, but this needs to be improved on in the future and it is hoped that through the DWP's framework more measurable outcomes will be recorded moving forward;
11. Councillor Hodgson stated that he appreciates the work that has gone into this report but feels that the introduction to the report should just say Wisbech and not Waterlees Wards affected. Councillor Cornwell confirmed that we have identified that this is a district wide issue, but this report was focussed on Community House;

12. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if Councillor Cornwell was surprised at the number of people who had responded to the questionnaire. Councillor Cornwell stated that we made it very clear to the local people that we wanted their feedback and were pleased with the response to the consultation;
13. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she is disappointed that the majority of FDC councillors have not even visited Community House but feel that they can discuss this. She asked why councillors would want to take away the skill and expertise that is there, it is a vital resource to the area. She thanked officers for their work securing the funding, and suggested that this should come back to the panel in 6 months to look at the progress that has been made moving forward;
14. Councillor Swan agreed stating that it should be added to the work programme around September for an update;
15. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that in addition to the recommendations outlined within the report the following recommendations should be made to Cabinet;
 1. If a major decision is being made by Cabinet that impacts wards within the district, local ward Councillors should be briefed before the issues are shared within the public domain;
 2. that funding should be sought before engaging in a phase of public consultation.
16. Councillor King stated that in addition the District Council should review its consultation procedures;
17. Councillor Mrs French thanked Councillor Cornwell, Councillor Oliver and the Officers involved for the time and effort that has been put into this project, stating that members appreciate that a lot of work has gone into this.

10.40am

Chairman