

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17 OCTOBER 2022

CENTRES FOR THE COMMUNITY

Executive Summary

The Centres for the Community are The Vyne in Knaphill, Moorcroft in Old Woking, Parkview in Sheerwater and St. Mary's in Byfleet. Over the past two years they have changed considerably to broaden their offer to benefit people of all ages. The day service for elderly residents continues at The Vyne and St. Mary's with new day services on offer in the Council's supported living facilities in Old Woking and Goldsworth Park. Other centres include Lakeview in Goldsworth Park, and the Alpha Road Community Hall (ARCH) and Maybury Centre in Maybury. These are owned by the Council and managed by community groups. The community provision and lease agreements for these Centres are being reviewed to ensure they are sustainable and provide a quality of service in line with the Council's strategic priorities for Woking communities.

The Centres are developing new partnership opportunities, centred around quality cafés and activities for all ages and mixing generations together. The new activities and hiring strategy reflect the Council's Health and Wellbeing and Corporate Priorities, as per the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Woking For All Strategy.

Following a recent restructure, the staffing costs have reduced and once all the cafes have been developed the annual savings will be c.£300k. The changes have demonstrated that by working in partnership and adopting new and innovative approaches, the Centres can improve their offer for residents whilst reducing costs. Moving forward the priorities are to improve the online promotion and booking functions to support families and carers, and to work with local groups to improve the inclusivity and diversity of the provision, for all communities.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the changes and transformation of the Centres for the Community to reflect the Council's strategic priorities be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 7th October 2022

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Centres for the Community provide spaces for support and activity for residents of all ages. They are The Vyne in Knaphill, Moorcroft in Westfield, Parkview in Sheerwater and St. Mary's in Byfleet. The Maybury Centre, The Alpha Road Community Hall (ARCH), and Lakeview in Goldsworth Park are all owned by the Council and managed by local groups through lease agreements. All of these Centres are in strategic areas across the borough, well placed to add value to local communities.
- 1.2 In recent years the Centres have embarked upon a transformation and are continuing to evolve to meet the needs of the community. They exist to reduce isolation and loneliness importantly for elderly residents; however, they provide support for the whole community, making the spaces vibrant for all generations and more sustainable. This report outlines the transformation and ongoing vision for the Centres to highlight the improvements and explore how they can continue to evolve.

2.0 Purpose of the Centres for the Community

- 2.1 The Council's Health and Wellbeing Priorities are supporting mental health, isolation and loneliness, independent living, carers and obesity. These priorities sit within a strategic framework within the Woking For All strategy and the priority of the Centres is to align with these, for all ages and communities in Woking. The Centres provide spaces for people to come for the day to socialise, eat a hot meal and enjoy social and physical activities. They are also used by various health professionals and community groups that utilise the halls and rooms for fitness, wellbeing and cultural activities. All use of the Centres seek to improve the lives and wellbeing of residents based on these strategic priorities.
- 2.2 Day services for the elderly run from The Vyne in Knaphill and St. Mary's in Byfleet. Woking Council staff provide this service in partnership with Woking Community Transport and food providers. At St. Mary's the daily uptake of the service averages between 10 and 20 customers with up to 30 people attending on busier days and over 70 for parties. Use at The Vyne is similar. There is scope to increase the day service further through better online promotion and improved booking facilities for families and carers. An online system will be developed this year, driven by newly appointed administration staff who joined in August this year. Residents can also access day services at the Council's two supported living sites; Brockhill in Goldsworth Park and Hale End Court in Old Woking. All of these services will benefit from improved administration and promotion and a day package to include the transport, meal and activities will make booking arrangements simpler for the customers, their families and Council staff.
- 2.3 In the years prior to Covid the number of elderly day guests was generally declining, a trend that was shared across the County. Discussions with other District and Borough Councils in Surrey showed consistent messages; that many older people, in general, no longer view typical Council-run day centres as appealing. Therefore, to respond to this need to evolve, informed by a local study and customer engagement project completed by a Woking Graduate, the Centres have shifted in their approach to benefit the whole community and, importantly, to create spaces where older people can mix with different generations and engage in a broader range of activity. The current offer of the Centres is summarised below.

3.0 Overview of the Centres

St. Mary's

- 3.1 Situated next to the public park in Byfleet, St. Mary's is an old school building and considered part of the local heritage of the village. Two years ago the Centre was under-used, frequented by a small number of day guests and occasional hirers. The coffee bar was run by Council staff and the offer was limited, the kitchen run the Council Meals Service. In 2020 a local

voluntary group worked with the Council to refurbish the site using recycled materials sourced from the local development sites. The unused outside space was transformed into a garden café, the inside spaces brought to life and the site is now a thriving social centre and hub of activity. The café, now named the Art Café, and kitchen is leased to a local Community Interest Company. This was agreed after the (now) café manager completed an apprenticeship with the Council and then created a new local community-focussed business. This has been a great success to date, improving the Centre by investing in local residents and their entrepreneurial ideas. It has increased the quality and overall offer for the community whilst reducing running costs for the Council, making the site more sustainable.

- 3.2 Family Services now frequent the Centre and Health Visitors meet families onsite weekly. It is often common to see toddlers mixing with elderly customers and parents interacting with the day guests which previously never happened. Byfleet United Charity fund a weekly parent and toddler group run by the Family Centre team and charity Homestart. Regular hirers include a weekly dance school, yoga, dementia respite care, counselling and more. In the future we are hoping to host a youth club for Byfleet young people in conjunction with Woking Youth charity and transform the salon which is under-used into a new local enterprise.

Moorcroft

- 3.3 Following the success of the St. Mary's refurbishment Moorcroft was also transformed using the same approach. The site no longer hosts a day service because local residents can access this service now at Hale End Court which is just round the corner. Moorcroft rooms are leased to various groups including Catalyst mental health services, Maternity Services, Chiropody, family health providers and youth counselling through Surrey and Borders Partnership. Other regular hirers include a well-balance class, church group, community choir, a weekly toddler group, and a martial arts and youth club for the young people in Kingsmoor Park, funded by Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing. Prior to the martial arts sessions there were regular reports of anti-social behaviour regarding some young people but for the time being, since this intervention, these have stopped.
- 3.4 Over the last 18 months, Surrey Care Trust have delivered the Woking Youth Hub from Moorcroft in partnership with the Council and Job Centre, funded by the DWP. To date, over 170 16-25 year olds have received employment support from this service. The team help young people with a range of needs to become job-ready and to gain employment. Between April and August this year, 21 young people have stopped requiring employment-support benefit having secured paid employment, which is a great outcome. We are likely to continue to provide the Youth Hub service throughout 2023/24, subject to a successful funding application for year three of its lifespan.
- 3.5 The kitchen and café were previously leased by a local charity, however, this ended earlier in 2022 and the café is currently empty. However, in January 2023, this will be leased by a charity supporting adults with additional needs into employment through hospitality. They have a good track record for making a success of community cafes. They are keen to work in partnership in Woking and are well suited to running a new venture from Moorcroft, which by nature of its location is less of a central hub compared with other sites. The Centre, from January, will increase in its vibrancy and social impact as a result of this new lease agreement. Again, like St. Mary's, the café offer will be high quality and the Council will be supporting a local enterprise to increase their offer in Woking, without directly funding staff and ancillary costs to run the kitchen and café, as was the case previously.

The Vyne

- 3.6 The Vyne continues to be a popular social centre for residents in Knaphill. This year a new garden was created in partnership with RHS Wisley in what was an unused and overgrown scrub area. This has improved the outside offer and maximised the potential for the green space for residents to enjoy.

- 3.7 The use of the Centre was temporarily diminished during Covid until recently, as the main hall hosted the Community Meals Services that required additional space to operate. Now, the Centre is starting to engage with more partnerships as per the other sites and conversations are in place with potential café and meal providers to lease the café, and health services to maximise the use of the Wellbeing Suite. Once this is in place the Centre will seek to reopen its direct access to the adjacent Health Centre which will attract even more customers and increase the opportunities to work more closely with Health partners.

Parkview

- 3.8 Parkview in Sheerwater currently hosts the Council's Family Services and Resident Engagement teams. The spaces are also used by various groups and partners including the U3A, Maternity, Chiropody, cultural groups from ethnic minority communities, youth counselling and other health and wellbeing provision, ESOL classes and a range of activities. During the regeneration period this space will support the transition of providers and services, as they move out of their current locations and into the new community spaces such as the Health and Community Campus and St. Michael's Community Hub. For more information about the community developments in Sheerwater please see the report entitled 'Update on Community Provision in Sheerwater' from the June 2022 meeting of the Executive Committee.

Lakeview

- 3.9 Lakeview Community Centre is situated in the heart of Lakeview in Goldsworth Park. The first floor is occupied by the Bangladeshi Cultural Association and the hall and kitchen is hired sporadically. The Lakeview Community Action Group (LCAG) have historically overseen community provision for wellbeing and youth. They are currently in conversation with ROC Woking; a community engagement group who are exploring ways to develop the reach and offer of the Centre and increase its activity. This would enable a wider partnership to develop in the area which is identified as an area of relative deprivation in Surrey. This approach will benefit the community and reduce the demand on the Council's Housing Revenue Account which currently covers all of the running costs, including business rates, of the Centre. This arrangement is hoped to be agreed by the end of 2022/23.

The Maybury Centre and Alpha Road Community Hall (ARCH)

- 3.10 Both of these Centres are in Maybury and are located in areas where they can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of the community. The Maybury Centre is managed under a lease agreement by the Maybury Centre Trust and The ARCH by Woking Asian Business Forum.
- 3.11 Both groups are exploring with the Council how they can increase their impact through partnerships with local networks, particularly focussing on engagement with the Woking BAME communities. The lease arrangements are being reviewed to enable them to be simpler and more sustainable. These are ongoing conversations and a particular focus is to improve the links with health partnerships and community support in these areas, maximising the use of these assets and making them sustainable for the benefit of residents.

4.0 Future aspirations

- 4.1 The offer of the Centres will continue to evolve. The benefits of the changes are not only financial by decreasing in-house service costs, but they increase the creativity, breadth and quality of provision for residents, as is evident to date.
- 4.2 Moving forward, a priority is to explore ways to increase the diversity of the service provision to reflect the cultural demographic of Woking. Currently, Parkview, The Arch and The Maybury Centre are used by different cultural groups but the use of day services is not diverse. The teams over coming months will explore ways to enable and facilitate greater use of the Centres

by ethnic minority groups. This will only be achieved through working together in partnership, as has been achieved already in other aspects of the offer. In the future the aspiration is to see an integrated mix of cultures utilising the everyday services together, as well as the various targeted activities.

- 4.3 The Centres have made a positive start to improve their offer. The team will increasingly work together across the borough rather than as individual centre teams, as has been the case in the past. The benefit of this will be to improve and streamline the administration and reduce room set-up demands, to enable more regular hirers to take ownership of the spaces they use. Changing the way we work and supporting staff through this change will take time and the teams are rising to the challenge well. The new approach enables more local talent to utilise Woking's community assets to improve the offer, increases local ownership and investment whilst making the Centres more sustainable.

5.0 Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 The Woking For All Strategy prioritises creating Healthier Communities across the borough. The Centres for the Community enable the Council to develop strong partnerships at a local level with a range of providers, from all sectors. The ongoing developments described in this report highlight the ways the Centres are expanding their reach, improving the quality of the offer and reducing costs whilst maintaining important services for vulnerable residents.

6.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 6.1 The Centres now prioritise regular hiring from providers that seek to directly improve the health and wellbeing of residents. The increase in regular hirers enables the teams to invoice less frequently which saves time. Overall, this approach reduces the financial risk to the hiring income by keeping the usage more consistent and reduces the need for additional staff support, for example to lock up and prepare rooms for one-off needs.
- 6.2 The improved offer for the cafes and kitchens by leasing these will save the Council c.£138k per annum when all of the Centres have been leased. To date, the kitchens and cafes at Moorcroft and St. Mary's are no longer funded by the Council and the full savings will be realised when a new provider for the café at The Vyne is agreed, hopefully later this year.
- 6.3 The recent restructure in the staff team have reduced the staffing budget by c.£162k per annum. Therefore, these combined have reduced the overall cost by c.£300k per annum which is a significant achievement.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 6.4 The Centres support the health, wellbeing and diversity of residents and play an important role in enabling community groups to meet together. A future priority is to ensure the day services are inclusive to all residents and to increase the use of the offer particularly from ethnic minority communities.

Legal

- 6.5 The increase of lease arrangements marginally increases the demands on the Council's Legal team.

7.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 7.1 Overall, feedback from residents and partnerships is highly positive and the Centres are gaining a reputation across the County for being innovative spaces for all generations.

Centres for the Community

- 7.2 As described above, a Graduate Trainee conducted a research project that recommended various ways to improve the offer of the Centres. This included individual interviews and surveys with customers to gain their input and ideas. Community engagement is important in all of this work and for example when planning the new garden at The Vyne this year, a group of regular customers attended a planning day to share ideas and jointly agree a design for the garden.
- 7.3 Moving forward, the new administration staff will improve the data collection and reporting for the Centres, including for the Council's Green Book, and collect and present customer feedback and ongoing engagement for continuous improvement.

REPORT ENDS