

Cabinet – 2 March 2005

Neighbourhood Resource Centres

Portfolio:	Councillor Adrian Andrew
Service Area:	Regeneration Housing and the Built Environment
Wards:	Blakenall, Brownhills, Darlaston, Willenhall South
Forward Plan:	Yes

Summary of report

This report outlines the work undertaken with the Neighbourhood Resource Centres (NRCs) to take forward the option agreed at Cabinet on 3 March 2004. The report seeks to continue the development of the NRCs and align the activities of the centres (existing and future) to the Local Neighbourhood Partnership (LNP) plans.

Recommendations

1. Cabinet agree that a sustainability plan, covering a 2 year period up to 31st March 2007, be drawn up in consultation with the NRCs, to be submitted to Advantage West Midlands and Government Office for the West Midlands by 31st March 2005. These plans must contain the framework for agreed lease arrangements with the Council.
2. Cabinet agree that the relevant LNPs receive review reports on the activities of the NRCs as part of reviewing the progress of their LNP plan.
3. Cabinet agree that standard leases for all the NRCs be established, to include clear criteria relating to any concessions, be introduced on 1st April 2005 as outlined in Appendix 2.
4. Cabinet agree to the implementation of the preferred options for each NRC as indicated in the report.
5. Cabinet agree that a progress report of developments at Goscote NRC be submitted to Cabinet by September 2005.

Resource and legal considerations

The NRCs were built with a combination of public funding including the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Funding was approved for six centres in the areas of Moxley, Goscote, North Walsall, Harden, Ryecroft and South Willenhall. The total expenditure was £2,520,932 - £1,077,932 from SRB2, £452,812 from ERDF, £142,134 from English Partnerships (EP) and £848,052 from Walsall MBC.

The expectation from external funders, who invested a total of £1,602.879 in the NRCs, is that the buildings will continue to be used for the purpose for which funds were granted for at least 20 years from the date they were built. Closure or disposal of the centres can, in some circumstances, result in claw back by the funders. The repayment of clawback would rest with Walsall MBC.

The main external funders (Advantage West Midlands for SRB and Government Office for the West Midlands for ERDF) are keen to avoid clawback. They have asked that the Council set out over a two year period a sustainability plan and continued community use for all the NRCs which will help to avoid the risk of claw back.

Centre	External funding	
Harden	SRB2	£4,698
	ERDF	£21,301
Goscote	SRB2	£449,119
	ERDF	£194,604
	EP	£58,510
Moxley	SRB2	£284,648
	ERDF	£202,204
	EP	£81,768
North Walsall	SRB2	£1,290
Ryecroft/Coalpool	SRB2	£120,185
	ERDF	£34,701
Willenhall	SRB2	£356,772
	ERDF	£76,250
	NOF	£172,880
	Willenhall Mem Fund	£172,880

The Harden Centre closed in the summer of 2004 due to continued vandalism. The management committee have handed the keys back into the Council. The properties used by the NRC were not included in the stock transfer and continue to be owned by the Council. They are likely to be demolished as part of wider development plans for the area. A proportion of any capital receipt received can be reinvested back into the community, and this would meet the requirements of the funders (AWM). These resources could therefore be allocated to deliver priorities identified in the LNP's partnership plan.

Other resource implications relate to the lease arrangements with the organisations currently occupying the NRCs. The Council is proposing to introduce standard leases for all community and voluntary organisations. Appendix 2 details the proposed formula for lease arrangements. These lease arrangements will give security to the NRCs for the use of the buildings and enable NRCs to seek additional external funding sources.

The introduction of a lease arrangement for all NRCs occupying council-owned buildings will strengthen the Council's relationship with this sector and ensure standards and charges developed are consistently and fairly applied. It also gives clarity as to how these buildings are to be cared for and that revenue collected will be earmarked by the Council for future maintenance and other requirements.

Citizen impact

The delivery of activities and support offered by the centres impacts directly on the communities in which they are based – Goscote, Harden, Moxley, North Walsall, Ryecroft/Coalpool and Willenhall, and in future years Brownhills. They are operating in some of the most deprived parts of the borough and reaching a wide range of individuals and groups located in these communities.

Community safety

The NRCs provide the Council with the opportunity to engage with local people on issues relating to crime and disorder. This local perspective can then be used to inform the content of the borough wide Crime and Disorder Strategy and reduce crime and fear of crime in Walsall.

Environment impact

None directly arising from this report.

Performance management and risk management issues

Performance management – embedding the activities delivered from these centres into the LNP plans will enable alignment to local and borough-wide priorities, and introduce local accountability through partnership working.

Risk management - the NRCs were built with a combination of public funding including the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and European Development Fund. Closure of the centres, significant change of use or disposal can result in clawback by the funders. The maximum potential clawback is £2,420,214.90. However, this clawback is covered in the capital value of property and is not considered to be a significant risk because the sustainability plans – with agreement sought from AWM – will focus on ensuring continued community based activities.

Equality implications

Part of the drive to establish NRCs was the commitment to engage all sections of the community and to ensure that all contributions are valued. Linking the activities and outcomes achieved by the NRCs to the LNP plans will ensure that local communities, voluntary and community groups can continue to effectively engage at a local level on issues that affect them.

Consultation

Neighbourhood resource centres are a valuable asset in the LNP areas – providing a range of services and activities identified by the local community. In addition, they are being utilised by service providers and programmes (such as Surestart) to target groups that can benefit from additional support.

The centres will be included in the LNP plans, and the impact on the local community and outcomes relating to the 2008 Vision will be monitored by the LNP as part of reviewing progress of the LNP plan.

Vision 2008

The NRCs contribute to Vision 2008 by:


- Providing programmes to encourage young people into positive activities, thus contributing to the Priority to “Ensure all people are safe and secure”.
- Providing learning opportunities so that lifelong learning can be an everyday reality with creative, innovative and relevant means to delivering learning in schools, colleges, libraries, home, in the community and at work - as set out in Priority 4.
- Providing opportunities to create strong working partnerships between the Council, local NHS and voluntary sector to build up a broadly based alliance to tackle key issues of health and social care, addressing local needs. – in Priority 5 “Make Walsall a healthy and caring place”.
- Through the use of the ICT suites in the centres, providing new ways to access services using the latest technology to address Priority 7 “Make it easier to access local services”.
- Providing a facility through which local residents, community organisations and voluntary groups can be consulted and ensure their views are heard – thereby meeting Priority 9 “Listen to what local people want”.

Background papers

Cabinet Report “Walsall Neighbourhood Resource Centres” – 3rd March 2004

Contact officers

Jason MacGilp, Assistant Director, Community Regeneration and Housing
Tel: 652066, E-mail MacGilpJ@walsall.gov.uk
Julie Ball, Head of Neighbourhood Partnerships
Tel: 654706, E-mail BallJ@walsall.gov.uk



Signed:

Chief Executive:

Date:



Signed:

Portfolio Holder:

Date:

1. Background and context

- 1.1 Neighbourhood resource centres were originally established in 1996 with the primary purpose of providing integrated bases and support for local access to public services. This included meeting space for neighbourhood bodies and voluntary groups, and other facilities depending on local priorities. The funding applications allowed for either new build or refurbishment of existing premises. The centres were a key initiative within the SRB2 programme.
- 1.2 The provision of local centres provided the opportunity to involve local residents in decision making, training, access to resources and child care places and to assist in increasing the number of local people in employment.
- 1.3 Six centres were established with a total funding package worth £2,520,932. Three were newly built (Goscote, Moxley and Willenhall) and three were refurbished premises (Harden, North Walsall and Ryecroft/Coalpool). Brownhills was planned to come on stream later once agreement had been reached with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) about occupancy and services to be delivered.
- 1.4 The original bid for SRB funding outlined the intention for the centres to become largely self-sustaining, with local residents actively involved in the future developments of the activities hosted at the centres.

2. Actions agreed by Cabinet on 3 March 2004

- 2.1 A report was presented to Cabinet on 3rd March 2004 providing a review of the issues facing the Council relating to support for the Neighbourhood Resource Centres. Three options were presented, with option two recommended and agreed. This outlined the following actions that would be taken:
 - a) The Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership and the Council to work with the potentially viable NRCs (Moxley, Ryecroft and Willenhall) to:
 - o Produce a robust business plan
 - o Consider establishing an umbrella organisation for NRCs
 - o Consider distribution of reserves held by NRCs no longer supported
 - b) Discuss with Brownhills and North Walsall the basis of their future activities.
 - c) Develop an exit strategy for Goscote, consulting on possible alternative uses.
 - d) Develop an exit strategy for Harden.
 - e) Extending officer support for 6 months to achieve the transition to self-funding.

Basic Proposals for Lease Arrangements for NRCs

- The Council will value the properties and state the annual market rental evaluation.
- The Council will expect NRCs to pay 50% per annum of the full market rental value for the lease, representing a 50% reduction in the rate the Council could collect. The lease will be granted for a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 6 years.
- NRCs will be responsible for the day to day repairs of the property, services and any other costs associated with running and managing the building but not for large capital expenditure.

These terms are basic terms that will form part of any lease and it will enable officers to have discussions with each of the NRCs.

The NRCs will be expected to include in their business plans a minimum of 10% of the market rent as a “responsive repairs budget” for the NRC to deal with minor repairs and maintenance issues.

Brownhills

Negotiations between the Council and the Primary Care Trust's (PCT) developer are at an advanced stage. A development proposal has been submitted to the Council and this is being assessed by an independent Quantity Surveyor appointed by the Council. It is likely, subject to this assessment being favourable and the PCT confirming their intention to proceed, that the development will be agreed in 2005. The services that will be provided once the landmark building in the area has been redeveloped will be a new district library, doctor's practice (4 GPs) a, pharmacy, and office space for a community organisation.

The preferred option is that officers continue active negotiations with the Primary Care Trust

Goscote

Building

The centre is a modern building with a large meeting/social room (with bar facilities) well equipped kitchen, computer room, crèche, gym, space for hair salon, tanning bed and launderette. Situated in the middle of a housing estate of some 300 homes; this community forms the majority of centre users although a few people come from Bloxwich/Blakenall to use the hair salon at the weekends.

Staffing/committee structure

The viability of the committee arrangements have been adversely affected by issues of probity and other legal matters which are currently being investigated by Audit and the Police. There are currently no plans by the local community to invite representatives of any external agencies to become members of the Committee. This will limit the centre's ability to develop and market new services and activities in the future. The local committee is in effect not operating as a properly constituted body. New consultation and management arrangements must be introduced to provide a new start for the estate.

The centre currently has a full time manager and a part time administrative assistant. Both members of staff are employed by the Croft Street Community Association. Usage of the centre has declined considerably.

Centre activities/use

Staff have worked hard to encourage agencies to rent the rooms for training courses and meetings. These groups include the Youth Offending Team, Drugs Action Team, the Health Action Zone, plus youth workers. A luncheon club is held twice a week (which includes taking meals out to local elderly residents) and courses are run in the centre by the College of Continuing Education and the Walsall Community Development Trust including IT and basic skills. The "Computer Bus" visits on a Thursday. During the evenings, bingo sessions are held at least once a week and the bar is usually open at weekends and on a Wednesday.

Funding/income generation.

Final year end accounts are available to September 2003. Financial records to September 2004 are currently with the centre's accountants. Income of around £6,000 has been generated since December 2003 through rental income and from other miscellaneous sources. This has contributed towards paying the running costs which are estimated to be around £10,000 per annum. This does not include the cost of staff salaries or lease charges.

Future Needs/Sustainability

New management arrangements and a new consultative forum would enable the centre to move forward more quickly than would otherwise be the case and provide a framework for building the confidence of the community and potential funders and users. A Business Plan needs to be developed to identify potential new services the Centre could offer.

Options

The two options available for this centre are to close down or be redeveloped as part of the wider renewal plans for the area. The latter option is recommended.

For this to work, the following actions must to be implemented:

- The management arrangements for the centre to be merged with those for North Walsall and Ryecroft/Coalpool. This will allow the centre to move on from its current management difficulties and also to work with the other centres to offer a choice of learning opportunities that complement each other. Therefore, the previous local committee for the Goscote NRC is no longer recognised by the Council and a new consultative group will be established as the first stage in new management arrangements for the NRC.
- Future activities to be delivered from the centre to link into the recommendations from the Goscote Estate Study (commissioned by Walsall Housing Group). This would lead to the centre being used as a base for consultation and management and implementation of the change necessary to transform the estate. Positive discussions have commenced between Walsall Housing Group and the Council to progress this idea.
- Options for the location of Council or other agency services continue to be explored.
- A joint business plan covering the three centres is to be developed in partnership with Bloxwich Housing Trust and Walsall Council. This is likely to take longer than other NRCs to finalise, but will include lease arrangements using the new formula.

Harden

This Centre is no longer running. Harden Alliance handed back its keys to the Council in July 2004. The building had been subjected to sustained and repeated vandalism and was considered to be no longer viable as a NRC. ICT equipment was relocated to the College of Continuing Education at its Forest Campus.

Option

This centre has closed. The option of reinvesting any capital receipt back into the community, for example linked to the Bloxwich & Blakenall Partnership plan, is to be explored by the Council and Walsall Housing Group once the wider development plans go ahead. AWM support this approach.

Moxley

Building

It is a modern purpose built centre with a staffed reception, ample parking, training rooms (including IT suite), crèche/kitchen and sports hall. It is well maintained with a light and airy feel. Good location, just off the Black Country Route.

Staffing/committee structure

The centre has both skilled and knowledgeable committee members and staff. Action has already been taken to expand the membership of the committee to include local agencies and businesses plus local residents. The centre employs three full time staff: a manager, an administrator and a youth worker (paid for by Youth Services). In addition there are 20 sessional workers and a core team of six or seven volunteers.

Centre activities/use

The centre offers a wide range of services which are based on community consultations. Activities include youth clubs, holiday playschemes (it is Ofsted registered), IT classes and short courses (basic skills, health and safety, food hygiene), luncheon clubs (and specific activities for elderly people) plus keep fit classes using the sports hall. The centre is used for private hire by local residents for social occasions and as a venue for a range of meetings. A future activity is planned related to Sure Start – the initiative is due to start using the Centre as a base for its provision.

At the current time, the Centre sees approximately 700 users per week, this could increase to around 770. Board members are looking at the option of additional premises/space as most rooms are fully utilised. Usage has increased considerably over the lifetime of the Centre. The Centre is open seven days a week 9.00 am to 9.00 pm, with evening cover provided by part time staff.

Funding/income generation

The Centre is currently drawing funding from the Council via a delegated budget. In 2003/04 this amounted to £27,466. This will change in 2004/05, when the funds will be allocated based on spend in specific age ranges. The delegated budget is used to cover the costs of at least 26% of the centre's salaries.

The centre has a track record of successfully bidding for funding and has recently secured a grant from the Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities Fund of £40,000. This will be used to cover salaries, core costs and to purchase new furniture. There are two further bids awaiting a decision.

Income generated during 2003/04 (from various sources including room hire, programme delivery, catering and the delegated budget) was £112,602. This was exceeded by expenditure, with a total cost of £116,830. The shortfall was met by reserves from the previous financial year. In total, the Centre generated some £35,555 (from catering and room hire) which represents 32% of its total income for the year.

Future needs/sustainability

Given the evident deprivation levels it will be important for the local community to continue to be able to access services at the centre. There is a wide area on which to draw and the Board have the ability to develop a strong business plan which can be used to secure further grant funding to supplement the centre's income generation.

Preferred option

This centre is a valuable community resource and supports the delivery of the 2008 Vision. The path to sustainability needs the following actions to be implemented:

- A business plan finalised by 31st March 2005.
- A lease arrangement in place with the Council by 1st April 2005.

North Walsall

Building

Unlike the other Centres, North Walsall is located in two former flats on a residential estate which have been converted into offices and meeting rooms. It is in a good state of repair and there is adequate parking nearby. The main office is a satellite office which is open on and off during the day, but has partnership links with the Croft Community Association where many of the training courses are delivered. Whilst these are two separate organisations, they have overlaps in terms of committee membership.

Staffing/committee structure

At the current time, there are three committee members of the North Walsall Alliance who have been elected by the local committee. The chair is a volunteer who also manages the centre on a day to day basis, with the support of a paid part time administrative assistant (employed by Croft Community Association).

Centre activities/use

The services that the centre currently provides include meeting space, catering services (e.g. for Croft Street Community Association and Surestart) and a drop in centre for local residents to access advice and support. In addition, the centre operates in partnership with the local police and the Youth Offending Team, and acts as a link between the community and the statutory agencies, particularly in relation to drugs issues and disorder which are prevalent on the estate.

Courses are provided (through the College of Continuing Education) and include paediatric first aid and breastfeeding. A crèche is available, funded through Surestart, and various clubs (youth club, junior club, girls club, and a Saturday club) take place. These are based at Croft Street.

Funding/Income Generation

At the time of writing, the centre was transferring its financial records from a manually based book-keeping system onto a computer-based system. Financial records will be available by 31st March 2005.

Future needs/sustainability

In terms of future activities, the centre provides services which link statutory agencies and the community. Income generation is limited to the small amount of rental space (which is on a sliding scale from £12-20) plus the catering income at the current time. The centre estimates they need between £11,000 - £15,000 to cover running costs. Committee members are keen to deliver more training courses in the centre rather than at Croft Street and are looking at courses to encourage young people into the centre.

Options

This centre will take longer to develop as a sustainable enterprise. The following actions are required:

- Merging of the management arrangements for this centre with those for Goscote and Ryecroft/Coalpool. This will encourage the centre to draw on the resource available to assist with capacity building and offer a wider choice of learning to its community.
- The current arrangement for the centre to act as a link between the community and the statutory agencies, particularly in relation to drugs issues and disorder be formalised and the option for a service contract to be awarded be explored.
- A business plan finalised by 31st March 2005 and a lease arrangement in place with the Council by 1st April 2005.

Ryecroft/Coalpool

Building

The building was previously used by Social Services, it is on 2 floors and there are some parking spaces available. There are a variety of rooms on the ground floor used for community computer training, childcare provision and space for local police officers plus a meeting/social room seating up to 40 people. The upper floor is rented to a computer recycling enterprise Discover IT (also known as Recover IT). This enterprise is integrally linked to the centre's future plans.

Staffing/Committee Structure

The centre has a new constitution and will be targeting new members with specific expertise (accountant, solicitor, social entrepreneur) at their AGM in December to enhance the skills base of the committee. They have one paid worker, employed by Ryecroft/Coalpool Valley Alliance Ltd, plus a volunteer who assists with cleaning and other general support. There are about 15 people who help out on a regular basis as volunteers at the centre.

Centre activities/use

The Centre is a member of Learning Net and runs the computer courses through the College of Continuing Education. It hosts Ryecroft Rascals – a free childminding club and two After School Clubs (for St Thomas' School). It is also the location for a driving skills course. It has bingo sessions and the community can hire the meeting room for small social functions. Approximately 60-70 people a day use the Centre.

Funding/Income Generation

The Centre has been proactive in submitting funding bids as a means to secure its future. It has recently been awarded £6,000 from the Black Country Knowledge Society and has two further funding bids pending (£20,000 from UK Online and £10,000 from TSB). Walsall Housing Group pays £4,000 per annum for the use of a room; Discover IT pays £7,000 on an annual basis for rent of space, and charges of £180 per day are levied for the hire of the centre to run the driving courses.

The total income for a 10 month period in 2004 was £19,305, of which £8,523 (some 44%) had been generated from rental and room hire. This income is set against expenditure of £11,485, hence a reasonable surplus was in evidence for this period.

Future Needs/Sustainability

The centre is developing its future activities around "Cygnet YC" a new business venture which aims to provide support to young carers through provision of IT equipment in the home, a homework club and a crisis advocacy service. Discussions are underway with the Institute of Social Entrepreneurs (ISE) who is supportive of the general idea of Cygnet YC. ISE will be working with the centre over the next 6 months to develop ideas that can generate income and evolve the centre into a social enterprise.

Options

The centre has good prospects of becoming sustainable through the development of its social enterprise. The following actions are required to cement its position:

- Merging of the management arrangements for this centre with those for Goscote and North Walsall. This will enable the centre to attract users from a wider catchment area and also support the development of the capacity of the other two centres.
- Clarification of lease based on new corporate formula.
- A business plan finalised by 31st March 2005 and a lease arrangement in place with the Council by 1st April 2005.

Willenhall

Building

A modern purpose built centre adjoining the health centre with ample parking. Well maintained training rooms (including IT suite), community café and well equipped kitchen; impressive fitness suite and sports hall. The Memorial Hall has a fully licensed bar. Well situated just off Willenhall town centre.

Staffing/Committee Structure

Willenhall Community Health and Resource Training Charitable Trust Ltd (CHART) acts as the Board of the centre. It has a wider membership and includes co-opted local business people as its board members. Other committee members represent specific local agencies; this ensures a good knowledge of local community needs.

The centre has a full time manager, three part time administrative staff, and a marketing/publicity officer who was appointed in April 2004 on a one year contract. Sessional staff are available to deliver courses. All staff are employed by CHART, and their payroll service is also used by other community organisations.

Centre activities/use

The centre runs a range of IT courses, youth clubs and activities aimed at elderly people. The sports hall and fitness suite are used extensively and the Memorial Hall is heavily booked for social events. The meeting rooms (including catering facilities) are booked well in advance. They also have regular "surgeries" at the centre provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau. The average weekly usage of the centre is estimated to be 950 people. The College of Continuing Education is actively involved and the centre also takes referrals from Job Centre Plus and Adult Education Services. It is open 9am - 9pm every week day and seasonally on a Saturday.

Funding/income generation

The centre drew £90,638 in 2003/04 from the Council's delegated budget and generates a considerable amount of income from its facilities. Total income for the year was £168,677 with total expenditure amounting to £138,397. The delegated budget is used to cover the costs of at least 32% of the Centre's salaries.

Future needs/sustainability

A Business Plan is being established with the intention to make the Centre self sustaining. The investment in a marketing/publicity officer demonstrates the centre's ability to plan ahead. Approximately £52,000 is generated by the Centre as a direct result of its activities outside of grant funding – this represents 31% of its total income, and indicates a positive position with potential for sustainability in the future.

Options

This vibrant centre is a valuable community resource and supports the delivery of the 2008 Vision. It is well placed to become self sufficient over the short term. However, the following actions need to be implemented:

- A business plan finalised by 31st March 2005 and a lease arrangement in place with the Council by 1st April 2005.