

BOLSOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMMUNITY HOUSES

October 2012

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Foreword of Councillor Mary Dooley Chair of the Safe and Inclusive Scrutiny Committee

The Safe and Inclusive Scrutiny Committee have carried out its review on the Community Houses and have made conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence received over the period of the review.

The Committee has considered Neighbourhood Management and its role across the District and concluded that what was required eleven years ago when first established has changed considerably to the needs of the people across the District today.

The recommendations set out in this report have not been taken lightly and Members have had to consider that the needs of the District have changed, and Neighbourhood Management needs to adapt in order to meet the current needs of our communities. We can now access services from many parts of the District using Contact Centres which provide a number of Council services under one roof.

The services provided to our communities by the Community Houses have been extremely valuable in the past and have successfully tackled major problems in these areas. The Committee feels that it is now time to move on and difficult decisions need to be made on the future of Neighbourhood Management and how this is best delivered in the future to support more of our communities than just those with a Community House.

I was pleased to see that we had two Members of the public attend one of our meetings and I hope that this gave them in insight into the work of Scrutiny and the challenges that the Council faces at present.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the hard work and effort that the two Project Workers have put into the service over the past few years, particularly recently when resources and staffing have been stretched, they have still continued to provide a service to some of our communities in a professional manner and they are a credit to the Authority. I would also like to thank these officers for their assistance and cooperation with our scrutiny review.

My thanks also go to the Members of the Safe and Inclusive Scrutiny Committee for their attendance and dedication to the review and to the Portfolio Holders, Directors and other officers involved for their advice and guidance throughout this review. Finally my thanks go to the Democratic Services Officer and Scrutiny Officer for supporting the Committee through the review process.

1. Introduction

Neighbourhood Management was first introduced to tackle the problems on the Castle Estate, Bolsover including poor housing, high unemployment and no sense of community. The Project Co-ordinator post was established with the transfer of an officer from CAN Rangers and the Community House on the Castle Estate, Bolsover was opened in 2001.

Other purposes of Neighbourhood Management included;

- To gather intelligence from the local residents to assist the Police and develop a multi agency approach to combat problems.
- Reduce anti-social behaviour with the provision of activities/events assisted by volunteers and partner agencies.
- Provide access to health care services by working in partnership with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) – promoting all health initiatives, assisting health visitors and promoting healthy eating, no smoking clinics and the provision of Health Trainers.

The Neighbourhood Management project aimed to help revitalise local communities by reducing social exclusion and bridging the gap between deprived areas and other parts of the district. The Council's involvement in tackling these issues led to many notable achievements.

Over the years, Neighbourhood Management has been the subject of a number of evaluations which have concluded that the focused work and intervention has made a huge impact on the residents and empowered them. The projects have also received numerous accolades.

The Community House at Castle Estate, Bolsover was initially provided rent free by Villagates, a private landlord in the area.

The Community House at South Normanton opened in February 2004 using a council property, 77 Eastfield Drive.

New Houghton Community House followed in April 2004, housed in the old Co-operative building on Rotherham Road, owned by Bolsover District Council.

Following the appointment of the Joint Directors and the restructure which moved Neighbourhood Management into Environmental Health, it was highlighted that no performance information was gathered for any of the Community Houses and information provided was purely anecdotal. A new system was put in place in January 2012 and the usage and reasons for contact have been recorded and monitored since this time.

The Community Houses are co-ordinated and run by a team of three comprising the Project Co-ordinator and two Project Workers. It should be noted that when commencing the review, members of the Committee were advised that the Project Co-ordinator had been on sick leave since May 2012 and at the time of writing this report, had not returned to work.

The role of the Project Workers has two parts;

1. Projects and outreach work which includes brunch clubs, stay and play and other activities. Some of these are delivered through the Community Houses and others are based at alternative community venues and;
2. Support, general advice and assistance through the Community Houses.

The Safe and Inclusive Scrutiny Committee's task was to consider the current demand for the Community Houses and the most effective way that Bolsover District Council could provide support and assistance to its more vulnerable communities across the District in light of the current financial climate, the pressures on budgets and the need to identify savings.

It is hoped that the recommendations set out in this report will assist the Authority in ensuring that it is providing the most effective service to meet the needs of all our communities across the District.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Community House at the Castle Estate, Bolsover be returned to the landlord, with any necessary works required by the Authority to return it to its former condition, suitable for rental accommodation.**
- 2.2 That the Community House at South Normanton be closed and returned to a suitable condition for rental as a council property, subject to any necessary planning permission.**
- 2.3 That the North East Derbyshire Women's Aid Domestic Violence Worker be offered alternative accommodation at The Hub, South Normanton.**
- 2.4 That the Community House at New Houghton be closed and consideration be given to the future use of the building and/or land.**
- 2.5 That the Joint Director of Health and Wellbeing together with the Senior Environmental Health Officer (Residential) and the Project Workers develop a plan for the future of Neighbourhood Management to cover areas across the District which will deliver services to more of our communities.**

3. Scope of the review

The aims and objectives of the review were to consider the reasons for setting up the Community Houses originally, how they were now used by residents and local people and the involvement of Community Safety in the Community Houses.

Members carried out the review with the following key issues in mind,

- Who is using the facilities?
- Are the houses accessible to members of the community?
- Performance and usage monitoring?
- What do the local agencies delivering services across the District think about these facilities?
- What is the cost to the Authority?
- What are the alternatives?

The Committee comprised the following Members,

Cllr Mary Dooley (Chair)	Cllr Terry Connerton (Vice Chair)
Cllr Andrew Anderson	Cllr Paul Cooper
Cllr Eric Hall	Cllr Brian Hendry
Cllr Duncan Kerr	Cllr Sandra Peake
Cllr John Phelan	Cllr Ken Walker

Support to the Committee was provided by the Scrutiny Officer and the Democratic Services Officer.

It should be noted that Councillors Cooper and Kerr were involved in the review work of the Committee however were not in agreement with the recommendations set out in this report.

4. Method of review

The Committee met on six occasions to consider the scope of the review, key issues they wanted to discuss and the people they wished to interview.

The Committee sought written evidence by way of questionnaires to local people visiting the Community Houses and the agencies providing services to local communities from the Houses in New Houghton and South Normanton. As the Community House at the Castle Estate had been closed since May 2012, questionnaires could not be left for people to complete who came in to access services.

A list of agencies providing services to local people from the Castle Estate was provided by the Project Workers and the Scrutiny Officer contacted each of these agencies by telephone to find out how these services had been provided since the closure of the Community House at Castle Estate.

Attached at **Appendix 1** is a list of stakeholders involved in the review.

Equality and Diversity

Within the process of the review, the committee has taken into account the impact of equalities.

It will be necessary for an Equality Impact Assessment to be completed prior to any final decision being taken on the future of the Community Houses by Elected Members. Further public consultation, once a decision has been made may also be required.

5. Evidence

The following evidence was considered as part of the review:

- Neighbourhood Management Presentation
- Website information – Neighbourhood Management
- Developing and supporting community houses, a good practice guide – Shelter, December 2008
- Neighbourhood Management report, February – May 2012 (South Normanton and New Houghton only) prepared by the Project Officers.
- Neighbourhood Management summary – usage figures and statistics.
- Completed questionnaires from local agencies operating out of the Community Houses.
- Completed questionnaires from local people using the Community Houses. (New Houghton and South Normanton).
- Verbal evidence from relevant officers and the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety.

6. Key findings

General Findings

- The Mobile Safer Neighbourhoods Team has reduced the amount of contact at the Community Houses for crime and community safety related issues as the team has a high visibility presence in the areas it covers. For this reason, the Community Houses Scrutiny Review Final report

Scrutiny Committee heard that Community Safety no longer require the provision of the Community Houses.

- There is value in the projects and outreach work that is carried out by the Project Officers and the numerous agencies including identifying and engaging with vulnerable people and families.
- Monitoring information was provided on the number of contacts in the New Houghton and South Normanton Community Houses between January and June 2012. This information shows the number of people accessing the Community Houses per month and on some months, the number of contacts does not equate to one contact per house per day. The reason for the highest number of contacts per month is people collecting dog waste bags. *(Please see appendix 2 for further information)*
- Other regular enquiries include photocopying, complaints and health referrals. These enquiries could all be dealt with by more effective methods e.g. through the Council's Contact Centres or Job Centre Plus, freeing up the Project Workers' time to focus on the outreach and project work covering a wider geographical area across the District.
- The questionnaires completed by local people, people using the Community Houses and the agencies delivering services undoubtedly show that people appreciate having this service on their doorstep and enjoy the fact that they can go and talk to the Project Workers and have their queries directed to the right place or receive assistance on a problem, considering them an essential part of the community. What the Committee have had to consider is the fairness in delivering these services to two areas of Bolsover District, when there are other areas, some equally isolated or deprived, and whether this is appropriate use of the Authority's resources if the majority of these services can either be delivered by other Council services such as the Contact Centres or other agencies working in these areas.
- The District Council cannot apply for funding to run community projects as a Local Authority and therefore most of the funding for community events and activities is done through the Residents or Community Associations with the Project Officers assisting these groups with applications, etc.
- £23,620.00 would be saved from the Neighbourhood Management budget with the decision to close the Community Houses based on the 2012/13 budget information provided by Financial Services. *(A copy of the Neighbourhood Management budget is attached at Appendix 3 for information)*

Castle Estate Community House

- Due to long term sickness absence within the Team, the Community House at Castle Estate has been closed since May 2012. Prior to the closure, the service had been reduced as there was less demand for services from local people. For the past two years there has been skeleton cover but no dedicated officer to run the house.

- The property, initially provided rent free by the landlord now costs the authority £400.00 per month rent which has not been accounted for in the budget. This means that money from the budget is now being used to pay rent and rates on a property that the Council is not using at present.
- During the time that the Community House at Castle Estate has been closed, there has only been one enquiry from the Residents Association as to the reasons why the House is currently closed.
- The Committee was advised that agencies and service providers who used the Community House to provide services to local people are now providing these services from the local Methodist Church at Hilltop, Bolsover.
- When contacting agencies from a list of contacts provided by the Project Workers, many of the people spoken to were not aware of ever providing a service through the Community House and claimed that other local venues in the Bolsover area were used including, Sherwood Lodge, GP Surgeries and the Methodist Church, Hilltop, Bolsover.

South Normanton Community House

- There is no set weekly itinerary for events at the South Normanton Community House. The Residents Association use the building one or two times per week to deal with correspondence, hold meetings and to plan and prepare community activities/events.
- The Community House currently provides a base for both the North Derbyshire Women's Aid Domestic Violence Worker and the Police. The Police also have a base at The Hub however continue to use the Community House as there is no computer at The Hub due to funding. Other agencies completing the questionnaire advised that they use the Community House on an ad-hoc basis or as an 'overspill' if the GP surgery, which is now located in The Hub, is busy.
- The general consensus was that the Community House has been a valuable resource for the community and instrumental in local people being able to access services and agencies. However, with a number of services provided in South Normanton transferring to The Hub, it is likely that demand for the Community House will only continue to reduce. It is not considered that there is sufficient demand for the Authority to provide two buildings, particularly when a large proportion of the 'drop in' queries at the Community House are regarding the collection of dog waste bags or referrals/complaints to various Council departments and this should be done through the contact centres in any case.
- Neither the Police nor North Derbyshire Women's Aid are charged rent or make any contribution towards the upkeep and utilities of the Community House. The questionnaire completed by the Police Community Safety Officer stated that the Community House was not the most appropriate place to provide services and The Hub was more appropriate.

- The Postmill Centre in South Normanton also provides a larger venue for events such as brunch clubs, etc. Alternative venues are already sought by the Project Officers as the Community House is not big enough to stage such events.
- There may be some planning implications in respect of 77 Eastfield Drive. The advice received from the Development Control Manager was that temporary planning permission was granted for the property which expired in September 2005. Further permission should have been obtained however, as in many cases, it was not. The use as a community house has not exceeded 10 years and therefore the property could revert back to a single dwelling without planning permission. As the property is on a residential estate there are no problems in principle with the change of use back to a dwelling. If external alterations are needed to turn it back into a house it is likely that planning permission would be required.

New Houghton Community House

- New Houghton Community House does operate to a weekly timetable which is regularly subject to change according to events and programmes starting or finishing. The current programme for September 2012 provided to members of the Committee shows that on four out of the five days (Monday – Friday) the Community House is used for a period of time by agencies to provide groups and hold meetings or courses. Most of the groups are run by Derbyshire County Council services, e.g. Children’s Centre, Connexions, Adult Education and the Multi Agency Teams (MAT). Everyday that the house is open, there is a drop in facility for residents with problems, concerns or seeking advice (as referred to previously and shown in Appendix 2).
- The Police, CAN Rangers and Social Services regularly visit the house to pick up on any community issues. The Police and CAN Rangers also have a set of keys to the property which allows them to use the kitchen facilities when they are working outside the opening hours.
- None of the agencies providing services from the Community House make any contribution to the utilities or upkeep of the building.
- The Committee was advised that there were no other venues available to provide these services in New Houghton. Over the course of the review, Members have discovered that the Stay and Play groups used to operate from the school before moving to the Community House and the New Houghton Community Centre, which is located across the road from the Community House is available for hire at a cost of £8 per hour including use of the kitchen. (*Information from Pleasley Parish Council website*). There is also a hall in the local church which could be considered by some of the agencies requiring facilities.
- Whilst it is accepted that New Houghton is an isolated community with limited transport and therefore local people are reluctant to travel out of the village to access services, it is not Bolsover District Council that is providing the

majority of these services to local people at the moment, it is simply providing a venue free of charge for other agencies to use.

- It was proposed to Members of the Committee that the land on which the Community House stands could be included in a future regeneration project with the Tarran Bungalows behind it in order to provide much needed housing within the District.

7. Conclusions

The Community Houses have been a victim of their own success and as a result, the demand for this type of service is no longer what is once was. The Authority now needs to look to the future and consider what service is required by our communities and how this can be delivered in the most appropriate and effective way.

On numerous occasions the Committee received comments that when first set up the Community Houses were excellent; however, the needs and demands of these communities were no longer the same.

The project work is providing so much more to our communities and it should be this work that forms the basis of the Neighbourhood Management team without the ties of a Community House base.

Without the Community Houses, the Project Workers would be free to work with more vulnerable people across the District and would be able to deliver more for local communities, across a wider geographical area, utilising other community assets. As the winter months approach, examples of the programmes that the Project Workers could roll out across the District are Affordable Warmth and working into 2013, the impacts of Welfare Reform.

In making their recommendations, members of the Safe and Inclusive Scrutiny Committee have had to make some difficult decisions. Whilst considering the evidence presented to them, the aim of the review has always been to consider what the Authority is responsible for providing and how this service can be provided fairly to all residents across the district.

The Committee suggests that an exit strategy is considered for the three properties recommended to be closed.

APPENDIX 1

Stakeholders

Councillor Brian Murray-Carr	Portfolio Holder for Community Safety
Councillor Ann Syrett	Portfolio Holder for Social Inclusion
Councillor Pauline Bowmer	Ward Member for Pleasley
Paul Hackett	Joint Director of Health & Wellbeing
Samantha Bentley	Senior Environmental Health Officer (Residential)
Emma Kendall	Project Worker
Kerry Oscroft	Project Worker
Chris Doy	Development Control Manager
Action Housing, Chesterfield	
CAN Rangers	
Citizens Advice Bureau, Clay Cross	
Community Voluntary Partnership	
Derbyshire Alcohol Advice Service	
Derbyshire County Council - Children's Centre	
Derbyshire County Council – Multi Agency Teams (careers advice, youth services and education support workers)	
Family Intervention Project	
North Derbyshire Women's Aid	
PCSO David Hancock (covering New Houghton)	
Police (based in South Normanton Community House)	
SNAP Development Project	
Welfare Benefits Service – Derbyshire County Council	
16 Questionnaire responses from local people in New Houghton	
14 Questionnaire responses from local people in South Normanton	
5 letters from local residents and 'Our House' Residents Association, South Normanton	

APPENDIX 2

Neighbourhood Management Summary 2012

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Total	% of jobs
Total amount of people using the service (including people using the service more than once	17	49	46	44	35	31	222	
No. of households visiting Community Houses		45	36	37	30	24		
Amount of people/or jobs being referred to other Council Departments	6	9	3	2	2	0	22	10%
Amount of people receiving poop bags	2	12	14	12	12	12	64	28.80%
Referral for Handyman Scheme	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.90%
People reporting Anti-Social Behaviour and crime	2	5	3	2	2	2	16	7.20%
Booking events, using the facilities and events	1	6	6	13	9	8	43	19.30%
Help with applications and paperwork	2	2	8	1	4	4	21	9.40%
Photocopying or use of Computer	2	3	3	5	2	1	16	7.2%
Housing complaints	0	1	1	2	0	2	6	2.70%
Issues with waste i.e. fly tipping, bins not collected and bulky waste	1	3	7	3	2	1	17	7.60%
Dog warden related issues	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0.90%
Enquiries about Credit Unions advice and grants	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	0.90%
Any other queries, etc.....	0	5	0	3	1	1	10	4.50%

Event	No. of events	Amount of people attended (total)	Average attendance
2012 Olympics Party	1	18	18
Adult education course	9	76	8.4
AGM	1	7	7
Brunch club	37	708	19
Caf meeting	4	19	4.75
Committee meeting	1	7	7
Core Group Meeting	1	2	2
Dog chipping	1	2	2
Family night	1	32	32
Food Co-Op	1	3	3
Healing rooms	1	7	7
Home visit	1	2	2
Information session	2	35	17.5
Librarian reading session	1	16	16
Listening to children course	4	16	4
Mini disco	2	52	26
Monthly meeting	1	7	7
NH street surgery	1	No record	Nil
One to one	2	1 (client didn't turn up)	Nil
Outreach appointment	35	72	2
PEEPS	6	57	9.5
Safeguarding meeting	1	8	8
St George's day celebrations	1	114	114
Stay and Play	18	245	13.6
Trip to Bolsover Torch Relay	1	20	20
Weighing clinic	1	4	4

APPENDIX 3

	Budget 2012/13 £	Forecast 2013/14 £	Forecast 2014/15 £
NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT (G010)			
Salaries	95,960	75,850	75,850
National Insurance	6,570	5,320	5,320
Superannuation	11,420	9,030	9,030
Employees Insurance	880	880	880
Health & Safety	280	280	280
Electricity	1,410	1,410	1,410
Gas	3,130	3,130	3,130
Rates	6,890	6,890	6,890
Water Charges	450	450	450
Insurance – Premises	280	280	280
Gas/Plant Facilities Management	500	500	500
Casual User Mileage	2,000	2,000	2,000
Stores Issues	340	340	340
Stationery	190	190	190
Telephones	3,470	3,470	3,470
Hired/Contract Services	7,240	7,240	7,240
Charges/Info & Comms Technology	6,370	6,290	6,330
Charges/Neighbourhoods Admin	12,530	12,610	12,710
Depreciation	9,020	9,020	9,020
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	168,930	145,180	145,320
Miscellaneous Income	(23,760)	0	0
TOTAL INCOME	(23,760)	0	0
NET CHARGE TO SUMMARY	145,170	145,180	145,320

¹Savings if the Community Houses are closed: -

Property related costs - **£15,850**

Non property related costs - **£7,770**

Total - £23,620

¹ Information provided by the Chief Accountant