

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

To: Leisure & Development Committee

Audit of Community Centre and Halls

11th August 2015

For Decision

Report to Committee

Linkage to Interim Corporate Plan	
Strategic Themes	Cohesive Community
Lead Officer	Julie Welsh – Head of Community & Culture
Cost: (If applicable)	N/A

The Purpose of this report is to both provide an update on the scoping on Council Community Centre provision to date, and to recommend a series of actions to progress work on Community Centre provision within the context of Council's approved Community Development Strategy.

Background

Council approved the Community Development Strategy in March 2015. One of the key strategic priorities within the strategy included 'Supporting Communities to achieve their maximum level of sustainability'. This element of the strategy includes facilitating the strategic development of Community Centre policy for the Council in terms of investment in Council centre provision, as well as support for community owned provision.

An Audit of Community centres and halls was carried out in spring 2015 to inform the implementation of this aspect of the strategy. Further to the completion of this scoping study/audit, a workshop was held on the 18th June to facilitate further discussion among Elected Members on the key conclusions and observations of the Audit Report, in order to help inform and shape future vision and strategy in relation to Community Centre provision.

At the workshop Elected Members discussion centred on the following themes:

A proposed vision for Community Centres in Causeway Coast and Glens:

There was a broad consensus that Community Centres should be the hub of local community activity. They are intended to contribute to strengthening local communities in local areas, promote partnership and collaboration in the delivery of improved services to local people, address poverty and disadvantage, improve health and well-being and build connected and cohesive communities.

The function of community centres given the new widened remit of Council:

There was broad recognition that there is much good and valuable work carried out in Community Centres. These facilities provide a focal point or hub in many local communities and can prove to be an opportunity to engage with and involve local communities. Members recognised a need to re-engage with some communities to rebuild trust and to ensure that centres are used to their full potential. There was a desire to move beyond the model of simply just 'halls for hire' with opportunities to link in with other Council functional areas to maximise service delivery opportunities in connected, collaborative ways.

Potential drivers for a Community Centre Strategy:

Members highlighted the following key drivers in relation to Centre investment/development:

- Efficiency, effectiveness, equality, equity.
- Community Centre provision that is community driven, with buy in and ownership from local communities.
- That Council play an enabling role, supporting communities to create community spaces. There was a recognition that Council could not be sole providers and that effective community partnerships would be key in maximising the potential for sustainability.

How Council can creatively address gaps in provision:

Some Members expressed opinion with regard to inconsistency in geographical location/provision of Community Centres across the four legacy areas. There was consensus that future Community Centre provision should be based on clear identification of need, mapping of existing provision to both avoid duplication and exploit partnership opportunities. Equity should also be a key determining factor in how resources are allocated.

Operational management options:

It was noted that a model in which Council both owns and manages the community centre is an expensive option.

There was a recognition that it is a considerable undertaking for communities to manage a Community Centre on a voluntary basis, and that there is a need to put appropriate structures in place to support community managed centres. Support should be provided to build capacity within local groups, to help build a volunteer base and in some cases practical support. Members agreed that there should not be a requirement for community groups to be expected to manage Council owned Centres if they did not have the capacity to do so.

Moving Forward:

Following consideration of the recommendations of the Audit Report and the discussions in the Workshop for Elected Members the following course of action is proposed:

1. Short Term Actions:

- 1.1 Set up a 'Task and Finish' working group to bring together officers across departments with responsibility for all areas of Community Centres ie. estate management, operational management and developmental support. The working group will agree clearly defined roles in relation to Community Centres and work towards preparing options for a Community Centre Policy Framework and Action Plan for the consideration of Council.
- 1.2 Prepare draft options for a Community Centre Policy Framework on the various options for Community Centres provision, including a framework for decision making with regard to capital investment in Community Centres and addressing gaps in provision.
- 1.3 A bespoke mentoring support programme is developed for the community groups that are managing Council owned Community Centres, in line with the Community Development Action Plan.
- 1.4 An Audit of Need in relation to community facility provision in Ballymoney town and an Options Appraisal is carried out in order to inform the proposals for investment in the centre of Ballymoney.

2. Medium Term Actions:

- 2.1 Development of a Community Centres Action Plan to articulate Council's proposed approach on the implementation of the Policy for Community Centre provision.
- 2.2 A programme of support is provided to Community groups to audit local community facility and activity provision with a view to encouraging better use of and greater community ownership of Community Centres.

Recommendation

The short and medium term actions highlighted in the above report are initiated:

- i. Set up a 'Task and Finish' working group across departments in relation to Community Centres.
- ii. Develop a Community Centre Policy Framework, followed by a Community Centre Action Plan.
- iii. Implement a bespoke mentoring support programme for community run Council owned Centres.
- iv. Carry out an Audit of Need and Options Appraisal in relation to community facilities in Ballymoney Town.
- v. Put in place a programme of support to audit local use and promote greater use of Community Centres.