

TO: COMMUNITY AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

ON: 8 JANUARY 2002

Agenda Item No: 5

Title: Use of Day Centre Kitchens

Author: Alex Stewart (01799) 510555

Summary

- 1 Following their successful bid, this report details the request from the Womens Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) to utilise the Day Centre kitchens at Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow and recommends that they be let to the WRVS on an annual lease for the management and delivery of Meals on Wheels.

Background

- 2 Members will be aware that following a Best Value Review, Essex County Council decided that both the supply and management and delivery of Meals on Wheels be put out to tender.
- 3 The tender process took place over the summer and the Council submitted a tender. The results were announced towards the end of November and the Council was unsuccessful in its bid. The WRVS was the successful bidder for the whole County with the exception of the Tendring District Council area.
- 4 Following the announcement, the WRVS approached the Council to see whether it would be possible to lease the kitchens at both Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow and the office, which is currently used by the Meals on Wheels team at Hill Street.
- 5 The kitchens are currently used for the preparation of the Council's Meals on Wheels Service. The Day Centres are owned and maintained by the Council. A voluntary Management Committee runs each of the Day Centres' under a formal Management Agreement with the Council. The current Management Agreements state that the Meals on Wheels Service has priority over the use of the kitchen facilities.
- 6 The Council is responsible for the rates, the fabric of the building (including kitchen and sanitary fittings etc.), utility services and share in the cost of replacement and repair of other fixtures and fittings. All furnishings and the running of the Day Centres are the responsibility of the Day Centre Management Committees.

- 7 The WRVS have requested the shared use of the kitchens at both Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow, associated storage facilities and the office along with use of the communal sanitary facilities.

The Proposal

- 8 Officers consider that by leasing the kitchens on an annual basis, it will offer the Council an additional income. At the time of writing, Officers are establishing a viable commercial rent for the use of the kitchens.
- 9 The facilities are already up and running and the Council is responsible for the day-to-day management and maintenance of the kitchen equipment. There would be no more work generated by operating such a lease. The Council would still retain its responsibility and would be able to ensure that maintenance of equipment etc. became an integral part of the leasing arrangements.
- 10 The approach made from the WRVS to utilise the kitchens would generate additional income for the Council and would ensure that the service delivery was not being disrupted for the elderly client group.

Recommended that the Council agree to the annual lease of the kitchens and associated environs to the WRVS for the purposes of the management and delivery of Meals on Wheels, subject to satisfactory terms to be agreed by the Director of Community Services in conjunction with the Chairman of the Committee.

Background Papers: Letters from WRVS dated 14 December 2001

Agenda Item No: 6

Title: BEST VALUE REVIEW OF COMMUNITY SAFETY & EMERGENCY PLANNING

Author: Sarah McLagan (01799) 510560 & Alex Stewart (01799) 510555

Member Reference Group : Councillors Mrs D Cornell, Mrs J Menell & A Dean

Summary

- 1 This report updates Members on this review following decisions at the last Committee Meeting and Council. It concentrates on one aspect of the original Action Plan and recommends a preferred staffing structure following a reconvening of the Best Value Member Reference Group.

Background

- 2 During 2001, a Best Value Review was carried out on the Community Safety, Emergency Planning and Drugs Prevention services provided by the Council. The Review concluded that the Council is undertaking work that could, and should, be carried out by partner agencies and organisations. In addition, the Review identified that there is scope for more joint initiatives with partners, better cross-sectoral planning and working and that some of the work could be outsourced. It also recommended a revised staffing structure.

Proposal

- 3 Since the completion of the review, Members have taken into account a number of unforeseen circumstances both at an international and local level, e.g., the severe flooding in October. It illustrated the ongoing nature of some aspects of emergency planning, and its relationship with aspects of community safety/development work. Although dealing with direct emergency planning work may be equivalent to about a day a week the demand on the service can occur at any time. As a result, it is considered that it is essential that the Council continue to manage the Emergency Planning function in-house. It is further acknowledged that to achieve this objective means that the role has to be related to other Council services.
- 4 There is clearly synergy between emergency planning and community safety/development. They require considerable joint working with the police, highways and other official bodies as well as Town and Parish Councils and voluntary organisations. Continuity in service delivery is better served by this arrangement. New work in relation to Town and Parish Councils may be needed following the Government's recent consultation paper and in view of the Administration's priority to "Examine activities and areas of expenditure which could be transferred to Town or Parish Councils."
- 5 In addition, the Council has decided not to appoint a Policy Officer to develop statutory work relating to improving performance management. Certain general aspects of work relating to the Community Strategy could be pursued by those involved in the restructured section. It is also recognised that work relating to the statutory Community Safety Strategy should be more explicitly reported to keep Members better informed. This is, of course, work that is delivered through the Community Safety Action Team (CSAT), made up of representatives from the Council, the Police, the County Council and other relevant partners.
- 6 Bearing in mind the above stated principles, and previous consideration given to a number of staffing options, it is considered that the following staffing structure is the most realistic option.
- 7 To provide an effective Emergency Planning function throughout the year it is necessary to appoint an officer with the primary role of Emergency Planning, together with other responsibilities. The officer would be responsible for planning, training and exercising staff, Parish Councils etc; being first call-out response officer; advising the Chief Executive in an emergency and carrying out necessary functions after an emergency has occurred.

- 8 Due to the variable nature of this role however, there would be periods when there is no specific Emergency Planning function to fulfil. These times would allow the officer the opportunity to support elements of Community Development and Safety projects and initiatives with others.
- 9 The Community Safety function would be managed and provided by a specific officer. This officer would be responsible for ensuring that the Council meets it's obligations under the Crime & Disorder Act/Community Safety Strategy. The officer would also be involved in securing appropriate partnership arrangements to the benefit of the Council as part of the previously agreed Action Plan and the Administration's priorities.
- 10 The Community Development Officer (Drugs) would continue to be responsible for Drug and Alcohol prevention work in the district and for seeking to provide a consultancy service to other organisations and local authorities, which could realise an income. In addition, however, he would become more involved in general community development work in the district. To reflect this change of emphasis there would be no explicit reference to drugs in the job title.
- 11 The consequence of the above would be three posts all reporting directly to the Community Development Manager. Their titles would be Emergency Planning & Community Officer, Community Safety Officer and Community Development Officer. Subject to job evaluations for the Emergency Planning & Community Officer and the Community Safety Officer posts, there should be a small financial saving.
- 12 In addition, the development of further partnership working on Community Safety, a further contribution to work on the Community Strategy and with Town and Parish Councils means less direct resources from this Council will be devoted to Community Safety with some consequent impact on service delivery. The extent of impact will depend on contributions made, and the effectiveness of partners and others. It never the less remains a serious challenge.

Conclusions

- 13 This approach recognises that there have been changes in circumstances since the initial reports from the Best Value Review Team. It ensures that the Council is maintaining the tenets of Best Value by managing its staff resources effectively and enables a greater flexibility to achieve the Action Plan originally agreed, by ensuring officers provide a more effective reporting and monitoring mechanism and, at the same time, assist in the delivery of other important services.

Recommended that three officers, designated Emergency Planning & Community Officer, Community Safety Officer and Community Development Officer, report directly to the Community Development Manager and that job descriptions be revised accordingly.

Background Papers: Best Value Review Meeting Minutes; Reports to Resources; Minutes of Full Council Meeting (November 2001)

Agenda Item No: 7

Title: THAXTED COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRE

Author: Sarah McLagan (01799) 510560

Summary

- 1 This report informs Members of the use made of the Thaxted Community Information Centre after six months of operation. It recommends that the hours of operation be extended to meet the identified demand.

Background

- 2 On 1 June 2001, the Thaxted Community Information Centre (TCIC) opened to the public to provide local residents and visitors with information about Council and local services, facilities and places of interest and a police service.
- 3 Members will recall that the Centre was jointly provided in a unique partnership between Essex Police and the Council. In addition to local authority and police services, the Centre incorporates a Tourism Information Point (TIP) provided by local volunteers, a Citizen’s Advice Outreach service and a Housing advice service.
- 4 At the meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee on 10 April 2001, Members asked that the success of the TCIC be reviewed at the end of the first six months of operation and gave officers direction regarding the monitoring parameters and indicators to be used to monitor the viability of the TCIC.

Current Operation

- 5 The TCIC operated under the following timetable between 1 June 2001 and 26 October 2001 (inclusive) :-

**OPENING DAYS AND USES FOR
THAXTED COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRE**

<u>USE/DAY</u>	<u>MON</u>	<u>TUE</u>	<u>WED</u>	<u>THUR</u>	<u>FRI</u>	<u>SAT</u>	<u>SUN</u>
UDC - CIC					9-1		
ESSEX POLICE			10-12		10-2		

TTIP				11-4	11-4	11-4	11-4
HOUSING			11-12				
UCAB					2-3.30		

- 6 The Community Information Centre is open 9am to 1pm every Friday and is operated by trained Council staff who are based at the Dunmow CIC. The Staff oversee the organisation of the Centre and help to ensure that there is the variety of information and advice available for people visiting the Centre. The average daily usage figures show that the Centre is at its busiest on a Friday.
- 7 An analysis of records kept about the enquiries visitors make when coming to the Centre shows that people seek a wide range of information and advice - from tourism information e.g. details of accommodation, purchasing guides and information leaflets, purchasing souvenirs to transport/bus timetable information and event and facility details. The Centre is also used to obtain details about Council services, the most frequent enquiries being about Community & Leisure, Environmental and Planning Services.
- 8 The TCIC has become the local centre for contact with Essex Police who have designated a police constable to attend at the TCIC on Wednesdays between 10am and 12noon and Fridays between 10am and 2pm. In addition to these published opening hours, the Centre is the officer's permanent base, adding considerably to public reassurance. Local residents have contacted or visited the officer to raise issues of concern and his presence in the town, particularly on Fridays (market day), has the marked effect of helping local people and visitors feel safe and less vulnerable.
- 9 The TIP is operated by volunteers (April to October inclusive) and managed by the recently retired Parish Clerk. A sum is paid to this person to undertake this role. The TIP operated previously from The Cottage at Clarence House, opposite the Church in Thaxted, between April and September during 1999 and 2000 and for the April and May of 2001 before it moved into the TCIC.
- 10 Appendix 1 gives total usage figures for the TIP. Clearly there has been a marked improvement in the use of the TIP since it moved into the new premises, despite the local Windmill, the major tourist attraction in Thaxted, being closed and the impact of foot and mouth.
- 11 In addition to these timetabled uses, the Centre is being used increasingly for meetings.

Feedback Gained from Survey Work

- 12 In addition to monitoring use made of the Centre, officers have undertaken a number of surveys and sought feedback from partner organisations about the impact and usefulness of the Centre and the demand for extending the operating times of the TCIC. The following methods/indicators were used :-
- a. Users have been asked about the service provided and what their requirement is for an extended service.

- b. A member of Staff carried out a non-user survey on four consecutive Fridays.
 - c. Local businesses and Thaxted Parish Council were asked to assess the impact of the facility and their requirement for an extended service.
 - d. Providers of the UDC Housing and the UCAB surgeries were asked to obtain feedback about the Centre.
 - e. A survey was sent to every householder in the Thaxted area (1,200 households) to seek their opinion about the TCIC/TTIP and whether they would wish to see extended provision.
- 13 The results of each of the above are summarised at Appendix 2.
- 14 Clearly, there is a consensus that the Council has provided a facility that is of great benefit to the local community and visitors to the district. People believe that the multiple use of the building, which enjoys a central location, helps to provide a focus for the town. With regard to the requirement for an extension to the opening hours of the TCIC, a majority of people do believe that it should be open more frequently to provide services. Many have stated that banking and Council Tax/Rent paying facilities would be an asset. Also, people would like there to be a permanent or more regular police presence.
- 15 The Parish Council welcomes the facility and suggests extending the opening of the TCIC if demand is evident. It also suggests that a facility for payment of Rents and Council Tax would enhance the Centre considerably. The local Traders Guild considers that although the Centre has had no impact on their levels of trade, it would be beneficial for it to be open more often and for longer hours. It suggests that a cash machine should be provided.

Extended Opening Hours

- 16 The survey results indicate that the public require the TCIC to be open for more hours. However, there is no clear evidence that there would be an increase in the use of the Centre if its opening hours were extended. It does take time for the general public to become aware of and use such facilities – and it is likely that use of the Centre will be self-generating the more it is open.
- 17 The service provided by paid staff is generic – catering for all types of enquiry from those about Council services to provision of local & visitor information. The TIP volunteers do not have the expertise to provide details of Council services and, therefore, concentrate on local and visitor information. Members will recall that the available budget of £20,000 allows for a total of 14 hours paid staff time to operate the TCIC part of the Centre.
- 18 Clearly, the Council could provide an extended service but it is essential that it is comprehensive, generic and consistent. To achieve this, trained, paid staff would need to be employed. In addition, where possible and practical, staff should work alongside TIP volunteers to give them support and guidance.
- 19 To enable such an approach, however, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed including Health & Safety - lone working and risk management - and insurance cover. Officers believe that these can be overcome by, for example, pairing up paid staff with volunteers, surgery

providers or the police, by pairing up volunteers and by having comprehensive procedures for staff cover and opening/closing of the facility.

- 20 The intention would be for an officer to be recruited immediately for 10 hours a week and for them to be trained under the same regime as existing CIC staff. They would also receive dedicated tourism training. The training could, however, take up to six months as it would be necessary for them to have a comprehensive understanding of all areas of Council business. Whilst training was being given Dunmow CIC staff would continue to operate the TCIC for 4 hours on Friday mornings and officers would arrange for the TIP to open according to the availability of volunteers and demand.
- 21 Once the officer is competent to provide the TCIC facility, the operational timetable for the facility would be adjusted to open to a total of 14 hours per week, taking into account the issues raised above and expressed demand. The post-holders hours would be increased to a total of 14 hours per week. Given that the lease for the building expires in April 2006, a "Future Events" contract could be offered to the employee.
- 22 With regard to future use of the Centre by the surgery providers, both are committed to continuing with their services. Indeed the CAB has seen a marked increase in clients in November, since moving to the morning slot vacated by the TIP. If this trend continues it is likely that it will wish to reconsider the time that it attends at the Centre. However, there is limited flexibility for service providers requiring a separate office/space to deal with confidential issues.
- 23 With knowledge of the Centre becoming more widespread, it is more likely that other service providers, such as the Benefits Agency and the Council's own Revenues section, will wish to take the opportunity to use the Centre.

Financial Services

- 24 The surveys undertaken indicate that some local residents would wish to see financial services provided from the TCIC. The services indicated range from a cashier facility to a cash machine and/or an ATM. The Council's current budget strategy does not allow for any growth items. Therefore, if Members were to agree to invest in such facilities alternative savings would need to be found from elsewhere in the Committee's budget.
- 25 Before officers undertake extensive work to investigate such provision, it would be helpful to receive Members comments on the public's suggestions.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 Members agree to the principle of extending the opening of the Thaxted Community Information Centre to a maximum of 14 paid staff hours per week.

- 2 The post of part-time Community Information Centre Assistant be established, with immediate effect, on a Future Contract basis for 14 hours per week (initially 10 hours whilst being trained).
- 3 Members advise officers on whether the provision of Financial Services at the Thaxted Community Information Centre should be investigated.

Background Papers: TCIC File & Correspondence