

Uttlesford District Council Scrutiny Committee Review

Title of Review

Wicken House Residential Study Centre Services

What are we looking at?

- Services for Young People currently based at Wicken House Residential Study Centre, Wicken Bonhunt in Uttlesford
- The impact of the proposed closure of Wicken House by Essex County Council on the continuation of the services.

What are we not looking at?

- The wider education and youth service in Uttlesford.
- Essex County Council's wider efficiency programme.
- The needs of other districts in Essex unless they wish to provide evidence for the review by Uttlesford.

Why are we looking at this?

Members of Uttlesford District Council have received many representations against the proposed closure of Wicken House suggesting that it is a very well regarded public amenity that cannot be effectively relocated to other centres owned by Essex County Council. The representations contain allegations that the closure process has not been conducted satisfactorily and that the reasons for closure are not correct.

What do we hope to achieve?

- Confirmation that the services presently provided at Wicken House will continue to be available to and be reasonably accessible by the young people of Uttlesford either at a new venue with equivalent accommodation facilities or that they will remain at Wicken House until a new and acceptable venue is available.
- To consider whether the decision to close Wicken House was reasonable when present service provision and alternative arrangements have been understood.
- Satisfaction that the users and clients of Wicken House were adequately consulted by Essex County Council prior to the recent closure decision.
- To provide the same stakeholders with an opportunity to express their concerns about the proposed closure in public or, exceptionally, in confidence.

What information do we need?

- A description of the extent and standard of service provision and how this will be at least maintained
- Whether cultural, sociological, environmental and other qualities delivered by Wicken House have been taken into account and how easily and at what cost these can be transferred
- The significance of the GIFT programmes for children in Essex and alternatives to provision at Wicken House
- Evidence on geographical factors and the impact on schools and any other users from Uttlesford of relocated provision.
- How the operating finances at Wicken House rank against the other centres
- The financial case for closure
- The impact of closure on accommodation-based service provision
- Whether Wicken House is truly an outdoor centre and how it fits in with the activities that are provided at the other centres
- Whether the consultation has been adequate in extent and quality. What support for closure was received, what counter points of view were put forward and how these have been considered. Whether customers (parents, children and corporate users) have been consulted.
- The basis on which the original selection of the two centres in West Essex for possible closure was arrived at
- The basis on which Wicken House was finally selected for closure
- Whether the arts and cultural provision at Wicken House is necessary as part of the Outdoor Centres programme and whether it needs to be and could effectively be integrated into the programmes of other outdoor centres
- Whether claims about inadequate disability access on the Wicken House website, but not included in the ECC cabinet paper, are justified and whether or not deficiencies could be remedied more cost-effectively than new build elsewhere
- Whether the learning environment at Wicken House has other shortfalls that make it unsuitable for current and future use
- Other relevant factors that ECC and users and customers of Wicken House and the wider service wish to put forward in advance of the review or raise at the public hearing or in correspondence.

How will the evidence be gathered?

Documentation requests from Essex County Council

A public hearing conducted by Uttlesford District Council's scrutiny committee

Written representations including, if necessary, confidential representations

Visit(s) by scrutiny members to Wicken House

Press advertisements or other effective public announcements and direct communications to facilitate the forgoing.

Potential witnesses and consultees

Essex County Council

Service providers

Past and present users – individual people and representatives of relevant organisations

Uttlesford CYPSYP

Representatives of local schools and colleges

Timescale

- Collect written information from ECC by mid September 2007
- Hold public hearing in the second half of September 2007
- Receive written submissions by end September 2007
- Prepare, approve and issue a report by end October 2007