

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 1 JUNE 2010**

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors R P Chambers, H S Rolfe, G Sell,
S V Schneider, L A Wells and A C Yarwood.

Also present: Councillor C Cant and Wendy Barron - representing
Dunmow Day Centre; Rev Ian Reed and Vanessa
Pedder - Thaxted Day Centre; Daphne Cornell and
Wendy Coe – Saffron Walden Day Centre; Charles
Wilkinson – Takeley Day Centre; Councillor
C M Dean – Stansted Day Centre.

Officers
in attendance: D Burrige (Director of Operations), S Daly (Senior
Emergency Planning Officer), L Lipscombe
(Emergency Planning Officer), S Martin (Head of
Customer Support and Revenue Services), L Milns
(Project Officer), R Procter (Democratic Services
Officer).

SC1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Jones and A M
Wattebot.

*Councillors Cant and C Dean declared a personal interest in the item on
Uttlesford's Day Centres, as the Council's representatives on Dunmow
Day Centre and Stansted Day Centre, respectively.*

*Councillor Sell declared a personal interest in the same item, as he was
Chairman of Stansted Parish Council, which owned Stansted Day
Centre.*

SC2 MINUTES

Subject to the amendment below, the Minutes of the meeting held on 13
April 2010 were received and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

The Minutes were amended at SC32 regarding the CCTV status report,
clarifying that it had been Councillor Schneider who had put the question
on obtaining data on evaluation of success rates of CCTV footage in
prosecutions.

SC3 MATTERS ARISING/ACTION LIST

(i) SC29 – Trading Standards *Buy With Confidence* Scheme

In reply to a question from the Chairman, the Lead Officer said publicity for this scheme would be included in the summer edition of *Uttlesford Life*.

(ii) SC31 – 2012 Olympics

In reply to a question from Councillor Sell, Councillor C Dean said the Olympics Working Group had been re-appointed by Annual Council, suggesting it was intended the group was seen as necessary. The Director of Operations confirmed any reports from the Working Group would fall within the remit of Community and Housing Committee. Councillor Schneider said she would raise the matter with Councillor Chamberlain as Chairman of Community and Housing Committee.

SC4 ACTION LIST

The Chairman referred to the scrutiny review planned for early 2011, and said he understood the transfer of Bridge End Gardens had now taken place. He asked the Lead Officer to prepare criteria for measuring success. The Director of Operations asked that consideration of this item be deferred, as the Minute from Community and Housing Committee was for review to take place after one year. It was agreed the review would take place in April 2011, to enable any issues to be addressed in good time before the local elections.

SC5 DAY CENTRE REVIEW

The Chairman welcomed representatives from the Council's day centres, and invited Councillor Rolfe to introduce the report on scrutiny of day centres.

Councillor Rolfe commended officers for what was a comprehensive piece of work. It had become apparent to the Member Reference Group that various options needed to be considered, but that the status quo could not continue. A number of irregularities had come to light during the review, such as the ownership of Stansted Day Centre by Stansted Parish Council (rather than the District Council, as had been assumed for many years), as well as inconsistencies in levels of income and fees. The overall conclusion was that it was unlikely that one size would fit all, and differences would need to be taken into account.

Councillor Rolfe said day centres benefited from officer support for only one day a week from the Tenant Participation Officer, Nicole Shephard-Lewis. The conclusions reached by the review were that that if the Council could afford to, it might contribute to a central resource to support the day centres. Day centres should also be helped to become more adept at obtaining grant funding, and to share best practice. Partnership possibilities with the voluntary sector should be considered. In conclusion Councillor Rolfe reassured day centre representatives that

closure of the day centres was not being considered, but that facilitation for day centres would be recommended on the basis that a co-ordinated day centre resource could become self-financing.

The Project Officer said a further recommendation was that an analysis of the day centre management agreements should be carried out.

(Councillor Chambers arrived at this point.)

The Chairman thanked Councillor Rolfe and said this was an opportunity for day centres to work with the Council to move forward. He invited representatives of each day centre to comment.

On behalf of Dunmow Day Centre, Councillor Cant said the management committee had for some time been greatly concerned by the burden placed on them as volunteers, therefore they welcomed the review. Last year they had asked the Director of Operations to attend a meeting as their volunteers were in danger of giving up. The role of a volunteer was a very busy one, and the prospect of being asked to do even more was a source of great concern. They had been alarmed by the reference to a co-ordinated day centre resource becoming 'self-sustaining', as Dunmow Day Centre currently made a loss, and it was difficult to see how they could contribute more without putting up the cost of meals they provided.

Councillor Cant said Dunmow Day Centre was a registered charity, but finding volunteers willing even to become trustees was difficult due to the responsibilities of the role. There were onerous obligations placed on the management committee regarding emergency contact and first aid provisions, of which anyone hiring out the hall had to be made aware.

Wendy Barron said this was a very difficult situation for the volunteers making up the management committee, as they seemed to be constantly facing increased responsibility. They felt strongly the District Council and not individual volunteers should have the responsibility for anything going wrong.

On behalf of Thaxted Day Centre, Ian Reed said it had been important to review the situation regarding day centres, and the way in which this Committee had gone about the task was appreciated. Thaxted Day Centre faced the following problems: first, its role encompassed not just provision of meals, but also a degree of care provision as many of their customers only started coming in when they reached their 80s and were quite frail. Secondly, there was a lack of new volunteers, partly due to the disproportionate increase in legislation over recent years which had contributed to the burden on volunteers. In terms of costs, Thaxted Day Centre was managing to break even, but struggled to keep costs reasonable.

Ian Reed praised the dedication of Nicole Shephard-Lewis in her work for the day centres, despite limits on her time. He warned that without extra help it would not be possible for Thaxted Day Centre to contribute

to a co-ordinated resource becoming self-sustaining, as their income depended on local residents, not passing trade.

Daphne Cornell then spoke on behalf of the day centre at Saffron Walden. The day centre was known as The Garden Room, and operated like a restaurant. The Garden Room had no problem in attracting 'young' elderly customers, and any change which caused potential confusion with a care centre could risk losing this group of customers.

Regarding legislative requirements for hiring the hall, the policy of the management committee was to insist on hirers holding adequate insurance and requiring them to undertake their own risk assessments. The day centre was dependent on volunteers, but benefited from the help of a co-ordinator for 4 hours each week, paid for by a coffee morning once a month. The centre was just about breaking even, but as a charity did not want to find itself in the position of making a profit. Mrs Cornell welcomed the review, although she had initially feared the Council was looking at costs of day centres. It was essential that day centres continued to operate, and that they were supported.

Mr Wilkinson spoke on behalf of Takeley Day Centre, which he said was fortunate in not having too many problems. They benefited from having a volunteer who dealt with all applicable regulations, and also had income from hiring the building to Essex County Council twice a week. This money enabled the day centre to keep the cost of meals low. However, it was sometimes difficult for the day centre to find enough helpers.

Councillor C Dean spoke on behalf of Stansted Day Centre, and also in her capacity as a member of the Member Reference Group. She said it had been a privilege to have had lunch at each of the day centres, and to meet the volunteers. She agreed the burden on the management committees was enormous. In Stansted the day centre suffered from the difficulty of finding new volunteers as existing volunteers got older. Stansted Day Centre had had two claims against it, one of which was the responsibility of the Council. The claims had caused much upset to the volunteers.

Stansted Day Centre had a manager, originally under a pilot scheme, and the post had continued. There were therefore certain differences between the day centres, raising the issue of fairness.

There was a difficulty in getting volunteers, which was the reason the Member Reference Group had suggested a day centre co-ordinator. This type of support would make a huge difference to the other day centres. The question of Criminal Records Bureau checks should also be considered, as it was only managers for whom these checks were necessary.

Finally Councillor C Dean said the day centres were really lunch clubs, and in Stansted the term 'day centre' was perceived as off-putting.

In reply to a question from Councillor Sell, Councillor C Dean said all comments had been included in the background papers which were available on request.

Councillor Sell agreed with the conclusion of the report, that there was a need for more support for the day centres. He raised two further issues, first that Stansted Day Centre was also used by other groups, as Stansted did not have a parish hall; and secondly, that the repairs policy could be improved, as minor repairs could perhaps be done locally rather than by calling the Council. He felt the day centre could benefit from re-branding. He requested further information on which day centres were thriving.

Councillor Rolfe agreed the current policy regarding repairs could be reviewed. He said there were opportunities to generate more income through greater use of the buildings, and the day centres were not doing enough to tap into grant funding. The five committees were all concerned about CRB checks: there should be a more common-sense process.

Wendy Barron said the Dunmow Day Centre did not break even, and could not employ someone to help. In her view, someone from Uttlesford should be coming round one or two days a month to carry out all such checks.

There was further discussion regarding reasons why not as many people chose to come to some day centres for their meals. The variation in day centres' requirements for booking meals in advance was noted as a possible reason, as was location, and also social reasons; the image of some day centres and increasing numbers of disabled elderly.

Councillor Cant said there were extensive expectations on volunteers, including many constraints on how they operated. By contrast, the WRVS operated as a business out of the day centre premises, therefore it was important to note the Council was allowing two activities at the Dunmow Day Centre, which to some extent gave rise to conflict. Daphne Cornell said this was a good point, and whilst the day centres had a good relationship with the WRVS, she hoped costs were set off as a result of this arrangement. It was difficult to find out information on how much was being paid by the WRVS for use of day centre premises.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, Councillor Rolfe said some work into the transparency of the accounts had been done, but not in great detail. The Chairman said this aspect needed to be addressed in future work.

Councillor Rolfe said the aim ought to be to give day centres as fair a playing field as possible. Working with the voluntary sector was an area

the Scrutiny Committee might want to consider. In each of these communities there were several public buildings and it was worth asking whether we were maximising the income to the best effect. He summarised the review by saying the Council did not want to close anything, but wished to give some degree of support, and to make the best of the volunteers.

Councillor Sell said the core clientele of day centres should be looked at, as many were likely to live on their own, and social interaction would therefore be crucial to their wellbeing. In Stansted, people were aware when regular attendees were unexpectedly absent, which could be important if someone had, for example, fallen at home. The situation was more complex than the report suggested. In Stansted there was evidence that more people would like to come to the day centre, but were restricted by lack of transport, or the costs of transport.

Councillor Chambers said the Council needed to champion support for the elderly population in Uttlesford, and he passionately believed in day centres. He assured representatives they should not interpret the report as requiring day centres to pay more money. As chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee, he would be responsible for implementing expected budget cuts, which across the country would be £1.1bn in the first tranche. He had therefore looked closely at the finance situation of day centres. He had suggested, as set out in the report, that the Council might look at a co-ordinator on the basis of a provisional two year contract, following which the post would become self-sufficient.

Councillor Chambers referred to last year's budget of £68K for day centres, of which £45K had been spent. If a similar level of expenditure could be maintained over a period of time, this would give breathing space, and in the future the Council could look to a more permanent solution. He stressed day centres were seen as a vital facility and the Council would keep them going. However, it was his job to keep the Council's finances stable. He went on to offer reassurance that the Council would lobby for reduction of disproportionate regulation such as CRB checks, and he praised the work of volunteers without which the whole system would collapse.

Members discussed further the proposed post of day centres co-ordinator. Councillor Sell said any underspend on the day centres' budget should be investigated to establish whether there was a trend. Councillor Chambers said the proposed post would be full-time to enable the co-ordinator to deal with all five day centres. However, he warned against raising expectations. The Chairman said what was being discussed was the principle of a district-wide co-ordinator, and the Project Officers would be entering into discussions with day centres to define that role more clearly.

Councillor Chambers agreed with the Chairman, and said if the day centres made any extra money they should be able to use that money for their own communities.

Councillor Rolfe referred to the opportunities open to day centres as set out in the report. The Council was not seeking a levy, but was encouraging the day centres to take these opportunities. All parties had the same intentions, and a plan would be worked up by the Lead Officer and Project Officers.

Day centre representatives said they were encouraged by this discussion and praised the work already being done by the Tenant Participation Officer on behalf of day centres. The Chairman asked officers to take the review to the next stage, and asked day centre representatives to submit any comments to Simon Martin, as Lead Officer.

RESOLVED

- 1 to note progress and agree to explore the feasibility of providing an enhanced co-ordinating resource for the day centres, initially on a pilot basis with a view to the resource becoming self-sustaining;
- 2 a comparative analysis of the management agreements between the day centre committees and the Council be undertaken and recommendations be made for a revision of the management agreements.

SC6

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

The Chairman welcomed the Senior Emergency Planning Officer, who gave an overview of the process of business continuity planning. He said a programme for introducing a strategy had been agreed with SMB, and the Emergency Planning Officer would shortly start work on taking these proposals forward. The programme would eventually involve spot checks on all departments.

Councillor Yarwood challenged the value of scrutinising plans which were not yet in force, and suggested deferring further review for six months. He questioned the methodology of spot checks on the grounds such an exercise could be more disruptive than practical.

The Chairman said these were helpful comments, and suggested it would be more useful for the Member Reference Group to meet first in order to consider its terms of reference. The Lead Officer suggested in view of the continuing scope of the day centre review, it would be sensible to defer consideration of business continuity until later in the scrutiny work programme. Councillor Schneider asked about the remit of the Emergency Committee. The Chairman advised its purpose was to deal with major emergencies. However, he would welcome potential input from the Committee. The Lead Officer said the remit of the

Emergency Committee was to deal with unplanned expenditure. Councillor Sell said there were some wards which were afflicted with problems such as flooding, and the relevant ward members might wish to be involved.

The Chairman asked that the business continuity Member Reference Group revisit its terms of reference; that the Committee defer consideration of this item until the December meeting; that any terms of reference for the Emergency Committee be circulated to Members; and that officers draw up a description of what was covered by emergency planning.

SC7

WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

Councillor Sell suggested as next year was approaching the end of this Council's term, there should be completion of the scrutiny of section 106 agreements.

The Chairman said suggestions for future scrutiny should be prepared to assist a new Committee following the election of a new Council.

The Lead Officer proposed a number of changes to the work programme in view of discussions. It was agreed that action on section 106 agreements, emergency planning and Bridge End Gardens would be deferred to the December meeting, and that enforcement priorities would be brought forward to the February meeting.

The Chairman brought the meeting to a close, and thanked the Day Centre Member Reference Group for their extensive work.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.