

**Committee: Scrutiny**

**Agenda Item**

**Date: 25 November**

**11**

**Title: Day Centres**

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Item for decision

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## Summary

1. The Scrutiny Committee established a task group and terms of reference to review all the Day Centres at its meeting on 24 June 2014 following on from the previous review completed in 2010. The terms of reference were:
  - To assess how each of the five day centres operated and what services were provided.
  - To assess the usage of each centre.
  - To review the locations of the centres.
  - To assess what building works would be required and any likely costs.
  - To evaluate the findings and formulate recommendations for each centre.
2. The Day Centres are non-statutory services and since their establishment the national picture has changed. The implications of National initiatives including spending reviews and localism, demographics and local initiatives were considered by the group.
3. The Task Group had the benefit of visiting and meeting with the management committees of each of the centres in question – Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden, Takeley, Thaxted and Stansted. The work has been completed and it is now appropriate to present the findings of the review to the committee.

## Recommendations

1. Whilst there are some similarities in the issues facing the centres, it is apparent that individual solutions be sought. The Scrutiny Committee is requested to send the following recommendations to Cabinet:
2. Appropriate District Council support should continue to be given to the provision of the Day Centres, which the Council recognise as valued service. However they are all vulnerable and steps need to be taken in order to secure the future.
3. Whilst the Centres are all used, they are running below capacity. Usage in some areas seems to be falling and all centres face some months running into reserves. Management Committees are vulnerable and recruiting volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult. It seems appropriate when taking all the issues into account and the population distribution data that the number of the day centres be reduced from five to three. Focus should then be concentrated on the remaining three key centres to provide additional services for the elderly and other vulnerable people.

4. Officers should be requested to engage with the management committees of Takeley and Great Dunmow Day Centres to explore the feasibility of providing a single Day Centre Service at Great Dunmow. There is the potential to offer subsidised transport from Takeley to Great Dunmow for customers. The cost of running the Community Travel Bus (15 seater) would be approximately £50 per return trip. This transport could be funded by cost savings from no longer running the Takeley building.
5. Thaxted Day Centre is under used, which has been an ongoing concern as highlighted in the 2010 review. Numbers seem to be declining and the Committee have tried various different approaches to attract new customers but none seem to have worked. Officers should be requested to explore arrangements for Thaxted/Saffron Walden as per the approach outlined for Takeley/Great Dunmow above.
6. Officers should be requested to investigate the feasibility of providing a fixed term (1year), part-time resource to provide support and assistance to the remaining three day centres. The remit given could include investigating partnership opportunities, developing service provision, improving income and identifying grant funding opportunities, increasing usage, support the recruitment of additional committee members and help with succession planning. All responsibility for Day Centres should be removed from the Tenant Participation Officer. A financial business case will need to be worked out to address the funding of this resource. Funding for this post could be found through the current General Fund re-charge for Officers' time, which would mean the Housing Revenues Account would have to fund the Tenant Participation Officers role entirely.
7. A review of the management agreements between the Council and the Management Committees that have responsibility for the day centres is undertaken. This should reflect the changes in responsibilities of both the council and management committees and include agreed service levels, monitoring and the relevant communication channels.

## **Financial Implications**

8. The estimated cost of implementing the recommendations is at the moment not known as there are various factors involved, including how frequently community travel buses are used and conversely, how much the land at Takeley is worth should that day centre be closed and the land sold. A question also remains over future use of the Thaxted site, should it be decided it is no longer needed for day centre use.

## **Background Papers**

9. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.
  - UDC Scrutiny Committee Review – Day Centres – Terms of Reference
  - UDC Scrutiny Committee Review of Day Centres reports and research 2009 and 2010.
  - UDC/Day Centre Management Agreements
  - UDC Budget Reports – Day Centres

- Day Centre Forum Minutes
- Day Centre Financial Statements
- Housing Management Day Centres working files
- Day Centres Accommodation Surveys

## Impact

10.

Communication/Consultation	Meetings have been held with members of the Day Centre Management Committees, stakeholders, customers and relevant Officers.  Further consultation will need to be undertaken to identify how service weaknesses can be addresses by any proposals coming out of this report.
Community Safety	Not applicable.
Equalities	All areas of equalities ad safeguarding were considered during the review. A full Equalities Impact Assessment will be required if proposals are taken forward.
Health and Safety	At present there are no health and safety issues to address.
Human Rights/Legal Implications	None specifically.
Sustainability	Further work on the proposals coming out of this report will address the sustainability of the Day Centre service and the agreements between the Council and the Management Committees.
Ward-specific impacts	District wide.
Workforce/Workplace	None at present. Any workforce issues which may arise from proposals coming out of this report will be addressed.

## Background

11. The Day Centres have been operational for over 30 years to promote the welfare of people over 55 years of age or registered disabled by maintaining a building for the purposes of recreation and other leisure time occupations and providing meals and refreshments for eligible persons.

12. There are five centres located within the district (Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow, Thaxted, Takeley and Stansted). The day centre buildings (with the exception of Stansted) are owned by this Council.
13. The Council is responsible for the buildings including external and internal maintenance, decoration and repairs costs. In addition the Council also pays for the costs of cleaning, electricity, gas, non-domestic rates, water, sewage, fire safety equipment and maintenance. Building and contents insurance for council owned equipment and parking costs incurred by voluntary day centre staff whilst on day centre duties are also paid by the Council.
14. The provision of the Day Centre service and management of buildings are the responsibility of the respective individual Management Committee, made up of groups of volunteers. They are completely separate from this Council.
15. Management Committees are responsible for the day-to-day running costs, insurances including contents, public and employers liability, licensing fees (if any), repair and replacement of furniture and equipment and health and safety compliance.
16. UDC used to allow the use of the buildings to the Management Committees in return for 50 per cent of any surpluses generated (exception of Stansted). However the scrutiny review in 2010 recommended that Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden, Takeley and Thaxted retain 100 per cent of surpluses (donations and lettings income) to help fund a Management role. This was agreed and implemented in 2012.
17. Investigations have discovered that the relationship between this Council and the day centres has changed over time in response to spending reviews and new government initiatives such as localism, Big Society and changing national trends.
18. The first centre was established in the late 1980s. To meet the County Council requirements of the "Care in the Community" legislation, the Day Centres provided meals on wheels service. All food would be prepared on site and distributed from the day centres. It was a successful service and due to the demand on the volunteers at the day centres paid staff were employed by this Council and a full time Meals on Wheels Officer oversaw the service.
19. The role of the Meals on Wheels Officer evolved and became the Meals on Wheels and Day Centres Officer. The role included maintaining regular contact with all day centres, to attend meetings where appropriate, coordinate maintenance issues and repairs and to provide advice to Management Committees on various issues.
20. Following a review in 1995 of the management responsibilities of both this Council and the individual Day Centre Management Committees, it was agreed that management agreements should be put in place. The management agreements were introduced to provide management committees with the right to use and manage the building as a day centre subject to the provisions stated within the agreement. Over time the Agreement was updated to ensure the management committees provided insurance for contents, public liability, employer's liability, theft and personal accident and other users liability ultimately handing the entire responsibility of the Day Centre to the Committees.

21. In 2002 the County Council became entirely responsible for the meals on wheels service leaving this Council with no duty. The WRVS then leased the kitchens at Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow to continue the Meals on Wheels service and this Council negotiated the transfer of staff. This saw the end of the Day Centre Officer role and any Council service provision at the Day Centres. More recently the WRVS have withdrawn from the lease and no longer provide this service.
22. Since 2002 the Tenant Participation Officer has provided support to the Management Committees when needed, support which has been extremely valued by each Management Committee.

## **Current Situation**

### **Management and Staffing**

23. Each day centre continues to be run by a management committee. The committees are made up of between six and 10 volunteers, including a UDC Member and a Parish or Town Councillor. Recruitment of volunteers, not only to sit on the committee but also to work within the day centre is becoming increasingly difficult and numbers in some cases have decreased since the last scrutiny review. One Committee, Thaxted, currently has only approximately five members, the number having halved since the previous review in 2010.
24. The Day Centre Management Committees work to the same Management Agreement, with the aim to promote the welfare of people over 55 years of age or registered disabled. The Agreement has sufficient flexibility to enable each Centre to suit the needs of their customers and communities.
25. Whilst there is an obvious benefit in having flexibility within the agreements, having discussed the Management Agreements with the Management Committees, there seemed to be confusion over various issues within it despite guidance being given. This includes their maintenance and repair responsibilities and how to report any issues or to seek advice or assistance.
26. Over recent years it appears that some Management Committees are finding it difficult to accommodate the increased requirements that come with running a charity, employing staff, carrying out statutory checks and other facility related duties.
27. During our investigations we discovered that some Management Committees are struggling. Some do not have up to date accounts, no job descriptions in place, some are having difficulties with payroll, some are not aware of their legal duties and responsibilities as employers.
28. In addition despite offers of regular Safeguarding training, which has been taken up by some of the committees, it become apparent that all do not have a full understanding of current Safeguarding issues particularly relating to their role as an employer and the use of volunteers and the potential impact on the customers.
29. It is important to remember that the Management Committees are all volunteers; none are paid to carry out this role. All put in many extra hours to keep the centres running and to provide a very good service for customers. In some cases they are

not aware of the procedures that need to be followed or even how to implement them. This pressure has left some of the smaller committees at breaking point.

30. The difficulties some committees are experiencing could be due to the diminishing pool of volunteers to manage the facilities and associated employees/volunteers.
31. It was hoped that with the addition of the 50 per cent in donations and letting income that the Committees gained in 2012, it would enable them to fund a management resource. Ideally the resource would manage the centres to alleviate Management Committees and Officers so they are able focus on other areas.
32. Three of five Centres have used the income to employ a Manager. The other two centres did not feel they required one and use the additional funds to support other paid roles such as the Cook, who in those cases seems to manage the day-to-day running of the centres as well.
33. The role of each Manager also varies between each centre and all work additional hours without payment. However it became apparent that this role is not working as effectively as the previous review had hoped and they all continue to need the help and support from Council officers.

### **Operations and Services**

34. Visiting the centres, meeting the committees and speaking with the customers demonstrated that the Management Committees and volunteers all continue to work extremely hard and go far beyond what is expected of them to provide a service for their customers, many of whom are regulars and visit more than once a week.
35. Surveying the customers using the centres it identified that the majority of people using the centres were aged between 70 to 90 years of age. The number of visitors would range from 10 to 30 on the occasional busier day at some centres.
36. Overall the popularity of the Day Centre service in some areas seems to be diminishing, and customer numbers are declining. The appeal of other low priced meals and drinks from other service providers is drawing customers away. In addition many villages and towns have alternatives available through the Church or other community services.
37. Takeley and Thaxted are both located opposite the Council's sheltered housing schemes. Upon investigation many of the sheltered housing tenants seem to prefer cooking their own meals and using the common rooms to socialise rather than visiting the centres. Very few sheltered housing tenants actually use the day centres.
38. In addition there still appears to be a stigma attached to the Day Centres. Most of the Centres have now changed their names to exclude Day Centre within the title but it seems that people are still put off from visiting them.
39. Each Management Committee has tailored their service to the needs of their customers to escape the stigma and to encourage use. Please see appendix 1 for the Day Centre Service Comparison table. Where opening early to serve

breakfasts, teas, coffee and cakes works in one place, it was evident that it did not work at another. Thaxted trialled a subsidised bus service to bring customers to the centre for a coffee morning. But this failed to bring in additional customers and has since stopped.

40. Saffron Walden, The Garden Room, market their service as a café, which seems to be appealing to a different market and attracting some under 70's. It is open all week from 9am to 1.30pm. They offer breakfasts, snacks, cakes, tea, coffee and a two course lunch. It is a popular Centre and often has 20 to 30 people for lunch in addition to the morning trade. The Committee has employed a Manager and the role appears to be working well. The Centre receives generous food and flower donations from Waitrose.
41. Crafton Room in Stansted appears to be a popular centre, open three days a week with customers coming in for tea, coffee and cake in the morning and then lunch later. Numbers for lunch range between 20 and 25. Other fundraising events are also successful as is letting of the building. The Committee have employed a manager, who is also the cook and works well above the hours contracted. They have a large pool of volunteers and drivers to ferry people to and from the centre. There is demand to open this centre for five days.
42. Takeley Day Centre is open twice a week, operating as a lunch club from 12pm to 1.30pm. Lunch costs £3.50 for two courses. Customer numbers usually reach 20 and no booking is required. Coffee mornings have been trialled but there was no take up. The Committee arrange a raffle once a week and often arrange subsidised day outings. In addition they have regular lettings to the Sparklers and Crocus Day Care. The Committee has decided not to employ a Manager, instead operations are split between the committee who all attend the centre to help out.
43. Thaxted Day Centre operates as a lunch club and is open all week from 12pm to 1.30pm. Lunch costs £4.50 for two courses. Customer numbers range between 10 and 15 and booking is required. Customers come in purely for their lunch. The Committee has decided not to employ a Manager and day-to-day management is provided by the cook.
44. The Rowena Davey Centre in Great Dunmow is open four days a week from 10am to 1.30pm, where a two course lunch is £5. They also offer tea, coffees and cake. The Centre has seen a reduction in visitors over the years, with Tuesday being the most popular session due to the attraction of the market with roughly 30 customers. Other days see customer numbers reaching between 10 and 15. Volunteers are reducing along with the committee members. There is a worry that the current committee is becoming frustrated and over-worked.
45. Research and conversations with Age UK, the Alzheimer's Society and Dementia Support have uncovered that there is a demand for a 'secure' day centre that offers adequate supervision. Some vulnerable adults are unable to attend the day centres as carers feel there is not the required level of support or supervision. Instead people now are now opting for the day centres run by Essex Cares as they have the level of supervision needed.

## **Buildings and Renovations**

46. Some of the buildings are in poor state, which could also distract people from attending. A recent break in at Takeley proves the vulnerability of some centres.

### **Stansted**

47. The building is attractive and is owned by the Parish Council. There is a Licence to Occupy the building and UDC pay £11,600 to the Parish Council, which was the approximate equivalent amount paid to operate the building.

48. It appears to be a popular centre, open all week with customers coming in for tea, coffee and cake in the morning and then visit for lunch later. Numbers for lunch never fall below 15 and there appears to be demand for opening five days a week. Other fundraising events are also successful as is the letting of the building.

49. The Management Committee has good links with the Parish Council for any maintenance/repairs concerns.

50. The standard of cleaning was a concern. It was very dirty on both visits to the centre. There is potential to offer our cleaning service to the parish.

### **Takeley**

51. The day centre building is a small building, built around 1971. It is brick built and has a flat felted roof with aluminium windows. The last Condition Survey identified that the roof, kitchen and windows would require replacement. The survey also identified that the toilets would be due for refurbishment and the centre is soon due complete internal decoration. The total costs for this work would be approximately £32,000, which all are life-limited and will need doing again. This sum does not include ad-hoc maintenance and repairs that are required with an older building.

52. The location of the building is not ideal for those with mobility issues and it is hard to find due to the lack of signage.

53. The building is rented successfully to ECC Crocus Day Care Unit twice a week and Sparklers a parent and toddler group once a week.

### **Great Dunmow**

54. The building was purpose built in 1993 and is in fairly good order but is showing signs of usage and wear and tear. The committee are working hard to improve this replacing the carpets, curtains and chairs.

55. It is located at the top of a hill in front of Chequers Lane car park, which causes difficulties for those with mobility issues. There is no free parking outside for customers.

56. The centre is large and is rented well, generating additional income for the centre.



## **Thaxted**

57. This is the newest building and is approximately 8 years old. It is a clean, light and bright purpose built centre. However it is in need of redecoration.
58. The centre is hard to find, it is located up a steep hill opposite Vicarage Mead sheltered housing. There is a lack of signage to the centre the only sign was overgrown and hard to see.
59. The building is very rarely booked or used outside of the Day Centre service.

## **Saffron Walden**

60. The building is formed from an old three storey property, with a much later added single storey extension at the back of the building with a flat roof. The roof has suffered from leaks over a long period.
61. The centre is centrally located on Hill Street, which is a busy road and is central to the town. The location of this centre is ideal and enables them to attract a lot of passing trade, which contributes to its use

## **Costs**

62. As explained in paragraph 15 the Management Committees are responsible for the financial provision of the day to day running costs.
63. This Council is financially responsible for the buildings (except Stansted) as well as the utilities. Each centre has differing financial requirements due to the size of the buildings, maintenance requirements, depreciation and the days they are open. In order to establish a comparable yearly running cost, to the Council, for each centre (excluding capital works) it was agreed to break the cost down per square meter based on 2013-14 actuals. Please see the table below:

Day Centre	Days Open	Yearly cost per Sq M
Great Dunmow	4	£62.95
Saffron Walden	5	£37.42
Thaxted	5	£89.51
Takeley	2	£145.02

## **Demographic Research**

64. From visiting the Centres and speaking with the committees it was established that the over 70s are the main users of the centres.
65. District population data of the over 65s and over 75s seems to be divided over three central locations Saffron Walden, Stansted and Great Dunmow. Please see

appendix 2 for maps displaying the distribution of the population of the over 65s and the over 75s.

## Conclusions

66. The implementation of the recommendations from the last review, to allow the Committees to keep all income from lettings, and to employ a manager to enable this council to reduced Officer support, has not proved as effective as intended. The Management Committees still require support from Officers, which is impacting on the Officers main duties.
67. The day centres all provide a valuable service to the community. It is felt that this Council should continue to support the provision of the centres. However this review has highlighted that some of the centres are at risk of failing. Aging committees and the lack of volunteers has shown that some centres are in a vulnerable state. If this service is to continue it appears that they will need support and assistance from this Council to support their future.
68. Currently the only financial support provided by this council is through the use of the buildings, utilities and officer support. The aging buildings will continue to be a financial pressure as displayed in paragraph 63.
69. Even with the current headlines suggesting there is an aging population it appears that the demand for Day Centres is decreasing as the user numbers suggest.
70. Stansted, Great Dunmow and Saffron Walden centres are all in prime locations, have the lowest operating cost and the greatest capacity to operate commercially.
71. The Scrutiny review has undoubtedly been a useful exercise and has highlighted the need for action.

## Risk Analysis

1.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
Closure of one or more day centres may impact on older residents who use them	3 – although current use is low, those who use the day centres would be affected	3 – it would remove a regular social activity	The proposal to provide transport to other day centres would alleviate the impact of this risk
Difficulty in recruiting/retaining committee members adversely impact	3 – current levels of committee members at some day	3 – day centres struggle to operate without	Fewer day centres would concentrate available volunteers for these roles

the running of day centres	centres suggest this is the case	effective committees	
The council incurs significant costs in maintaining day centre buildings	3 – costs are detailed in the report	2 – some repair costs are contained within the council's revenue building repairs budget	There are examples of buildings in a poor state of repair. Fewer day centres would mean more money available to spend on the remaining ones

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.