



*SCRUTINISE*  
*PERFORMANCE*  
*ANALYSE*  
*NEGOTIATE*  
*NETWORK*  
*EVALUATE*  
*REPORT*  
*SUPPORT*

## Tenant Scrutiny Panel Report

# SCRUTINISING COMMUNITY CENTRES

March 2012

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**Introduction**

**Who we are:**

We are the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, known as 'Spanners', made up of 5 tenants and chaired by Roger Pell.

'Spanners' stands for:

- Scrutinise
- Performance
- Analyse
  - Negotiate
  - Network
  - Evaluate
  - Report
  - Support

#### **What we do:**

We investigate our chosen topics and report recommendations to the Housing Review Board on our findings. Whilst we are independent of the council, we liaise with officers and tenants to gain information. This enables us to give a balanced perspective to support the Housing and Inclusion Service to regulate and improve its performance.

#### **Why we chose to scrutinise Community Centres:**

As a new group we wanted to choose as our first topic something that was not being reviewed by the council and was reasonably straight forward to achieve.

We brainstormed a list of potential topics and chose Community Centres as it best met our criteria as a new group.

### **How we did our investigations**

We developed a **scoping paper**<sup>1</sup> which outlined the areas to explore and set boundaries around the topic to make sure we stayed focused.

We then agreed which methods we wanted to use to complete our investigations. This included:

- Site visits
- Tenants' survey
- Mobile Support Officers' survey
- Streetclean survey
- Open Forums with tenants
- Staff interviews/meetings/paper trails
- Staff reports (eg Housing Review Board reports 28<sup>th</sup> September 2006/8<sup>th</sup> March 2007)
- Speaking to Fire Service

Copies of all our findings can be found in our A4 folder evidence file.

All recommendations are based on evidence provided by officers and tenants. It may be that there is information that we were not made aware of, which may impact on our findings.

## What we found

Community Centres largely seem to have been neglected and looked sad, out-dated and unwelcoming. There seemed to be no internal co-ordination to make sure these centres are managed efficiently and concerns were raised about the management of fire, health & safety and other regulations. Our recommendations focus on addressing these issues and promoting the centres to increase their use, potentially creating a revenue stream.

To balance this, we were pleasantly surprised to find the following:

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

- The proposed extension to Park Close Community Centre, Woodbury will provide more flexible, larger space, which will be appreciated by people using the centre.
- Clayton House in Littleham and Churchill Court, Lymstone running 'Click-it' (Get Digital) sessions, using young people to teach computer skills to older people
- Clayton House is used to provide lots of activities for younger people eg cooking, art work, homework club, job club
- Polly and Victoria are very enthusiastic, driving involvement forward, developing activities for younger people (film, music etc)
- Community Centres do appear to be appreciated as essential meeting places
- Yonder Close Community Centre is exceptional should be used as template for other centres for cleanliness and decoration
- Although the council are comfortable that Community Centres may not make a profit (or even cover cost of running), there is a revenue stream crying out to be used if promoted effectively
- Millway Community Centre, Axminster is well-used and has been re-carpeted by a local private company and re-decorated by volunteers, (using donated equipment/products) which has created a stunning change at no cost to the council

**Our recommendations**

<b>RECOMMENDATION ONE</b>				
Make fire risk and health and safety assessments a matter of urgency <sup>2</sup>				
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Priority 1</b>	<b>Priority 2</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>
<b>1.1</b> Make this the specific responsibility of one officer (see recommendation two) and ensure all	Staff e-mails - highlighting confusion over responsibility;			

<sup>2</sup> We are pleased to note the report to the Housing Review Board on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2012 regarding fire risk assessment of blocks of flats and recommend this includes community centres

legal responsibilities are met/files kept up to date	Information supplied by fire service Site visit – information not displayed; fire muster points mostly not displayed; fire extinguishers in wrong place			
<b>1.2</b> Invite the fire service to inspect community centres, recommend maximum numbers and highlight any other factors required	Information supplied by fire service Site visit – information not displayed; fire muster points mostly not displayed; fire extinguishers in wrong place			
<b>1.3</b> Assess each community centre for equality of access and develop a prioritised plan to address needs	Site visit – observation Difficult to get clear information from officers			
<b>1.4</b> Assess each community centre for health & safety/health & hygiene risks and produce a plan to address	Information supplied by fire service Site visit – observation Difficult to get clear information from officers			
<b>1.5</b> Develop and instigate a plan for energy audits in line with any legal/ regulatory requirements or good practice guidance	Staff interview (last audit 2008)			

## RECOMMENDATION TWO

Appoint an officer to oversee the Community Centres to include:

- Oversee the Community Centres
- Perform fire risk and other health & safety assessments according to legislation
- Administer bookings,
- Keep notice boards up to date,
- Set up e booking system via website and maintain up to date web site,

- Carry out weekly inspection,
- Inspections after bookings,
- Check equipment etc,
- Publicity,
- Organise repairs,
- Arranging cleaning to centres

Further recommendations	Evidence	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
<p><b>2.1</b> Introduce centralised booking system via one telephone number (direct to officer's mobile) to make it easy for people to use</p>	<p>Council booking system – very ad hoc            Tenants survey – didn't know who to contact            Focus group – struggled to find who to contact/social committees acting as barrier to booking            Site visit – no information displayed</p>			
<p><b>2.2</b> Keep notice boards up to date and visual (ie windows or external notice board). To include all legally-required notices such as evacuation procedures</p>	<p>Site visit – out of date, cluttered, not visual, couldn't always find legal notices            Tenants survey – couldn't find notice boards or were locked inside centres</p>			
<p><b>1.3</b> Provide white board/pens as solution to instant information ie list of events; can be used for training</p>	<p>Site visit – lacking; use of calendars (small print – need to know where to find them)            Tenant survey – not aware of events being held at centres</p>			
<p><b>1.4</b> Promote inter-community centre events to increase take up</p>	<p>Tenants survey – didn't know this could be done            Focus group – didn't know what other centres did or that they could invite other centres to join</p>			

	in			
<b>1.5</b> Complete regular booking schedules in advance (up to a year)	Streetscene – so they can get in to clean Staff e-mail – having to change booking at short notice because regular event had not been booked in			
<b>1.6</b> Book cleaning schedules in advance as regular booking	Streetscene – so they can get in to clean			
<b>1.7</b> Simplify booking process, making it customer friendly, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Booking form (first come first served)</li> <li>• What is available to the hirer ie crockery</li> <li>• Acceptable Hirer Standard ie clean up after event</li> <li>• Key code (refundable deposit required)</li> <li>• Cancelation policy</li> </ul>	Tenant survey – didn't know where to go to book; kitchen needs regular cleaning Staff interview – takes up to 4 people (plus insurance officer) to make a booking; not talking to each other) Site visit – old fashioned approach – needs modernising			
<b>1.8</b> Complete user audit/review the role of social committees and their remit	Focus group/Tenants Survey – social committees controlling booking, telling you what nights you could have or not letting them run desired events Staff interview – audit process has started but needs to be completed			
<b>1.9</b> Draw up simple risk assessment form for each booking	Staff interview – not carried out at present, not sure who now responsible, information conflicting			
<b>1.10</b> Organise cleaning or replacement of laundry/towels/tea towels/washing up cloths	MSO Job description – not included Staff survey - toilets/kitchens dirty, could do with better			



	cleaning; no-one responsible for hygiene, washing tea towels etc Staff interview – MSO's not responsible for these tasks			
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<b>RECOMMENDATION THREE</b>				
Promote and make better use of community centres				
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Priority 1</b>	<b>Priority 2</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>
<b>2.1</b> Survey local community to establish what activities they'd like in their community centres	Tenants survey – don't know what's on; nothing to inform them; could be used for computer skills, cooking lessons Focus group - turned down by social committee; not enough for youngsters, especially during school holidays; feedback is needed on what tenants want in their centre Clayton House experience – younger people using centre and working with older people			

<b>2.2</b> Promote community centres as useful meeting point for tenants/community	Mobile Support Officers questionnaire – more younger tenants could support the centre; good for group meetings; promote for the community not just the social committee			
<b>2.3</b> Promote community centres via new tenants welcome pack	Tenant survey - Been here for a year – didn't know we could use it; keep fit and exercise classes could be held			
<b>2.4</b> Mix young and older residents for example young people teaching computer skills/older residents teaching cooking skills	Focus group – 'adopt a granny' to teach skills such as cooking, knitting, carpentry Clayton House/Churchill Court – young people teaching computer skills to older residents			
<b>2.5</b> Complete the review of publicity to include opportunities for promoting community centres locally	Staff interview – review of publicity needs to be completed Tenant survey – not knowing what's going on; couldn't read the notices; would attend if given more notice of events			

## RECOMMENDATION FOUR

Inspect and survey all community centres to establish a 3-5 year work plan (on-going maintenance programme) and inspect/update equipment/furniture

Further recommendations	Evidence	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
<b>3.1</b> Assess fire risk assessments/disabled access and take any appropriate actions	Staff interview – fire risk assessments need completing Site visit – doors not wide enough			

	for wheelchair, steps outside fire doors, fire doors leading into private gardens			
<b>3.2</b> All equipment and furniture to automatically become the property of the council as soon as it is in the community centre	Site visit – too many locked cupboards (belonging to ...) Tenant Interview – what’s put into the hall becomes the property of the council			
<b>3.3</b> Develop a forward plan to upgrade and refurbish community centres (example – proposed Park Close, Woodbury extension); modernise decoration	Site visit – mismatched, tired, drab décor; not welcoming; support at Park Close, Woodbury for extension Tenant survey – décor dirty Tenant feedback (Park Close, Woodbury) – main function room too small, centre inadequate to prepare and serve food			
<b>3.4</b> Equipment to be standardised ie all white crockery (bulk purchase cost savings)	Site visit – mismatch, cheap, cracked cups			

<b>RECOMMENDATION FIVE</b>				
Develop community centres’ self sufficiency				
<b>Further recommendations</b>	<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Priority 1</b>	<b>Priority 2</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>
<b>4.1</b> Identify cost of running each community centre	Staff interview – no information appears to be collected on costs since 2008			
<b>4.2</b> Create centralised ring-fenced pot for community centres use only	Staff interview – currently all goes into housing pot, not used purely to improve/benefit community centres			

4.3 Review charges to ensure these are appropriate	Staff interview – charges not changed for three years (HRB report)			
4.4 Charge private individuals/companies for advertising in community centres	Site visit – notice boards ad hoc, messy, out of date information Tenant survey – not useful			

## Conclusion

This was our first scrutiny activity and was very interesting to do. It was good to examine an area not being examined by the council.

The process was different to what we expected – there was much more work involved than we first thought – but it has been very enjoyable and satisfying. Staff and tenants were very supportive and we learned a lot about how the council operates.

Training (often free) at Trafford Hall, Taunton, Swindon and locally helped considerably and the networking made us realise we were more competent than we thought.

We have enjoyed the process of scrutinising and have learnt a lot. With on-going training and the experience gained we will refine the process to make it more efficient next time, for example developing a method for cross-referencing recommendations with evidence and recruiting at least 2 more members.

We are pleased to find positive practices to balance our recommendations.

To recap, our top five recommendations are:

1. Make fire risk and health and safety assessments a matter of urgency
2. Appoint an officer to oversee the Community Centres
3. Promote and make better use of community centres
4. Inspect and survey all community centres to establish a 3-5 year work plan (on-going maintenance programme) and inspect/update equipment/furniture

5. Develop community centres' self sufficiency

***If brought up to standard, advertised properly and made easy to book, Community Centres could be used more regularly thus increasing revenue, eventually becoming cost neutral/ cost positive.***

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank the following for their contribution and support during this project:

- Officers of the council who supported us and patiently searched for information in answer to our questions
- Tenants and other staff who took part in our surveys and open forums
- Trafford Hall and TPAS for the free training
- Various experts who guided us on our way

A special thank you goes to Jane Reading and her team for their unswerving help facilitating this project

**Appendix A – Scoping Paper**