

EXECUTIVE

16 MARCH 2006

BELLFIELDS AND STOUGHTON YOUTH & COMMUNITY CENTRES

SUMMARY

This report asks the Executive to consider the implications of Surrey County Council's proposed withdrawal from the Bellfields and Stoughton Youth & Community Centres and recommends that representations be made to the County Council objecting to its proposal.

This report has been submitted following a request from the Executive at the last Council meeting to make a response to the County Council as part of the consultation on its Business Development Review.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Bellfields and Stoughton Youth & Community Centre buildings are both owned by Guildford Borough Council (GBC) but are currently run on a partnership arrangement between GBC and Surrey County Council (SCC). These two Centres have now both been identified by SCC, within their Business Development Review, for possible withdrawal from this partnership arrangement and removal of the County Council's current funding and support.
- 1.2 Only a basic level of detail regarding this proposal has been provided by SCC at this stage (see **Appendix 1**) and an implementation date has not yet been confirmed. SCC does, however, require comments regarding the proposals to be received by Friday 17 March 2006. Accordingly, the Executive and Chairman of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee are invited to determine that the call-in procedure under Procedure Rule 69 (f) should not apply in relation to the decision on this matter.
- 1.3 This Council provides two other Community Centres, at Park Barn and Haydon Place, Guildford, both of which used to be jointly run, with SCC providing a youth element. The County Council withdrew from these Centres some years ago and with this Council's increased contribution to their revenue funding, have both been able to generate sufficient funds to cover their additional day-to-day operating costs. This might also be achievable at Stoughton and Bellfields, but only if the same additional support is given by this Council and the communities that the Centres serve.

2. MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 Should this withdrawal be confirmed, the implications for the two Centres are as follows:
 - a) **Youth Centre Staffing** - currently, due to SCC staff shortages, a youth club is run on only one evening per week, catering for approximately 20 young people at each venue. Should appropriate staffing have been provided to run additional youth club sessions, it is very likely that the local young people would have attended on these occasions, as the clubs at both venues have been well supported, thus indicating a local need.
 - b) **Withdrawal of Youth Clubs** – Any withdrawal by SCC will mean that Youth Clubs will no longer be run by SCC from the two Centres or even offered elsewhere, as the service provided is likely to change. This is of particular

concern, as not only, as stated above, are these Youth Clubs currently well supported, but they are also in areas noted as needing a higher level of support, with a greater number of socially excluded young people. Thus, if the existing Clubs close and new local facilities are not provided, these young people would be left with no local provision in high need areas. They would then be encouraged to travel to the Town Centre, if they could afford to do so, or find an alternative site to meet locally.

- c) **Revenue Funding** - currently SCC pays a proportion of the revenue funding for each Centre. This would be withdrawn. For the current financial year the funding is:

- i) Bellfields – Total revenue cost: £32,730 of which £14,473 is paid by SCC
- ii) Stoughton – Total revenue cost: £26,780 of which £12,730 is paid by SCC

In addition, SCC pays 30% of each Centre's heating, lighting and caretaking bills. This is in the region of £1,500 per building.

- d) **Administrative Support** – currently SCC provides free administrative support for both Centres, by way of taking bookings, billing hirers, Secretary to the Management Committee and other general tasks. If this support were lost it is extremely likely that if voluntary help cannot be found, somebody would need to be employed by the Management Committee to undertake this work.
- e) **Payment to Caretaker** – the Caretaker employed at both Centres, on a part time basis, is currently paid through SCC's staff payment system and then reimbursed by the Management Committees. It is very likely that this operation would cease and the process would need to be undertaken through the Management Committees direct.
- f) **Possible closure of the Centres** – Should the Centres become financially unviable due to the loss of SCC funding, closure of the venues may need to be considered. Other than youth provision, the Bellfields Centre currently provides a venue for a nursery school every weekday morning (approx. 30 children each day), recreational activities e.g. dance, football and martial arts and individual social bookings. Stoughton accommodates U3A classes and one-off social bookings; the Management Committee is currently working with the local Residents' Association and other groups to generate additional use. A totally clear picture of community use, or potential for it, is not possible as regular community users were not encouraged at all times, to allow space for additional youth use should resources be available to provide it.

3. THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

- 3.1. The partnership working with SCC in providing youth and community facilities complies with this Council's Core Value of focusing on providing what the community needs by way of dialogue and consultation and delivered in close partnership with other organisations. The Council's Key Strategic Priority of "Social Cohesion" is also served by this partnership.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Centres have historically run on the basis of GBC/SCC providing the revenue funding for general repairs and maintenance to the building and the Management Committees retaining the booking fees from hiring the halls, to pay for the day to day running of the Centres, heating, cleaning, furniture, etc. This has generally worked

well in the past with the Management Committees maintaining a reasonable financial position.

- 4.2 Should SCC withdraw its current funding to the Centres (£27,203 plus help with running costs) as detailed above, even if GBC agrees to make up the difference on the main revenue account, there is likely to be a problem for the Management Committees paying the day to day running costs.
- 4.3 Unless additional hirers can be found that can, at least, compensate for the loss of SCC's contribution to the day to day running costs it will be difficult for the Management Committees to cover their outgoings. This is especially the case with the Bellfields Centre, which is already in a difficult financial situation, only just breaking even. The financial situation is not being helped by the steep rise in gas prices and the general community hirers requesting/requiring low hiring rates to be able/willing to book the venues. The possible requirement for additional venues for after school clubs may, however, help to alleviate some of the problems with hirings.
- 4.4 It is fair to state that due to its more modern design and smaller size the Stoughton Centre is likely to be able to cope more easily without SCC input than Bellfields.

5. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. There would be no loss of GBC staff through the proposed withdrawal, however as stated in paragraph 2.1(b) above, the loss of SCC administrative support may require replacement through additional staff hours/part time work. Should either of the Centres be closed subsequently, this would have implications for the staff working for the Management Committees.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 It is important to note that unlike more recent joint arrangements (such as day centres) there are no legal agreements in place tying SCC to a partnership at either of the Centres and it is therefore at liberty to withdraw as and when it sees fit to do so.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. Should the SCC financial assistance be withdrawn from the Centres, if the Borough Council cannot provide additional funds and/or should additional monies not be raised by the Management Committees, the Centres are clearly at risk of closure.

8. CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1. As detailed in paragraph 2.1 above, there are a number of potentially damaging implications of SCC's proposed withdrawal from the Bellfields and Stoughton Centres. Not only would young people, in these areas of high need, lose well-liked and supported youth provision, but it could also put the future of the Centres themselves in jeopardy with the possible loss of a nursery school, recreational and social activities.
- 8.2. The documentation provided by SCC to support the proposal is very short on detail and very little information has been given about how any new system of youth provision would be put in place, by when and how it would be sustained. Whilst it is encouraging to note that the County Council will be providing improved youth facilities in central locations, those young people in Bellfields and Stoughton who currently participate in the youth club activities (which it would appear are not to be

replaced) may find it difficult to access the centralised provision. SCC's withdrawal would therefore cause a great loss.

- 8.3. The only thing that does seem clear at this stage is that if this Council does not put in a strong objection to these proposals and request further dialogue and information from SCC, valuable youth provision and possibly community facilities in Bellfields and Stoughton are very likely to be lost.

9. DECISION

- 9.1. Due to time constraints allowed by SCC to reply to its proposal regarding its withdrawal of support from the Bellfields and Stoughton Youth & Community Centres, the Executive is requested to resolve that the following statement be submitted to SCC as this Council's response to the consultation:

“Guildford Borough Council strongly objects to the County Council's proposal to withdraw its support from the Bellfields and Stoughton Youth & Community Centres. The Council is extremely concerned about the detrimental effects this measure would have on the young people of Guildford in these areas noted as needing a higher level of support and the risk this action would cause to the future viability of the buildings for community use.”

Reason for Decision:

To provide a response from this Council to the County Council's proposal to withdraw support from the Bellfields and Stoughton Youth & Community Centres.

Background Papers:

SCC Business Development Review document.

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Youth Services

The Council is committed to providing a modern and relevant youth service that has an increasing focus on working with young people within their communities. The vision is to increase the momentum of the move away from relying on 'traditional' youth centres in order to free up more youth workers to respond to localised needs.

The proposal is to develop a range of contemporary, fit for purpose young people's centres, located across the county within each of the boroughs/districts, through which young people can access a range of services when they need them. The intention is that these centres will be open seven-days a week, in partnership with other providers. This is in line with the Council's policy of greater integration of services and working with the voluntary and not for profit sectors.

Young people say they wish to engage with the Council in locations that are relevant to them and not through 'traditional' youth centres that they often do not view as an attractive place to be. In response to young people and to realise the vision, a number of the existing youth centres not fit-for-purpose will have to be closed in order to provide the investment needed to develop the youth service.

The youth development service is making a considerable contribution to wider County Council priorities, particularly in relation to community cohesion, involving young people in democratic structures and extending opportunities for learning.

Supporting information

The youth population of Surrey 179,538 (11-25 year olds), and the main audience for youth services 89,204 (13-19 year olds). The Council has seen a continuing reduction in use of its youth centres and over 50% of youth work now takes place in schools, colleges, town centres and other locations popular with young people - i.e. not in youth centres.

In the community survey and council tax consultation people said that they want to see improvement in services for young people. The Council's Youth development Service currently operates 42 youth centres. The plan is to close 15 youth centres. Many of these are in historical locations and may not reflect the current make up of the county.

Work is still ongoing to finalise a proposed list of possible centres for closure. The centres identified will include work to identify the facilities available in each community and voluntary sector/partnership services in the area.