



Report of the Cabinet Member for Better Communities

To the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel –
6 March 2019

Community Groups and Centres

Purpose:	To brief/update the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel on 6 March 2019
Content:	A briefing/update on the general activity and position of Community Groups and Centres.
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and to forward views to the Cabinet Member via a letter from the Panel Convener
Lead Councillor:	Councillor June Burtonshaw, Cabinet Member for Better Communities
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1. Background

- 1.1 For nearly half a century Community Centres have been at the heart of the communities of Swansea. They have provided an effective means for people to make their own contributions to the development of their communities. The support given to them from the section has enabled us to compare centres at very different stages of development and in different areas to see how they are all attempting to meet local needs.
- 1.2 The last 18 months has seen a strengthening of Friends of Parks groups, 11 of which have been established.
- 1.3 Swansea Council owns 38 Community Buildings and leases 1 from Swansea & Brecon Diocese (**list attached at Appendix A**), 36 are licensed to Voluntary Management Committees on an Annual rolling Licence (**attached at Appendix C**) with 2 buildings awaiting a volunteer model. The committees manage the buildings within the framework of the Licence which clearly sets out the expectations of both parties.

- 1.4 We currently have 29 active Friends of Parks/Open Spaces with 1 undertaking a lease and 1 considering Community Asset Transfer (**list attached at Appendix B**). Currently no formal agreement is in place and a draft document is currently being discussed and consultation with Friends is taking place.
- 1.5 For the purpose of this report a community building will be defined as a building which acts as the focal point to meet the needs of a community in terms of provision of social, recreational, educational and cultural activities as well as encouraging volunteering. "Friends of" will be defined as a group of interested local people who come together to improve the appearance, facilities, conservation value and safety of their local park.
- 1.6 Within the Community, Partnerships, Destination Development Section there is a team of 1FTE Community Development Monitoring Co-ordinator a vital key role to provide, advice, guidance and recommendations to management committees, volunteers and community groups to ensure that all building management and range of activities delivered comply with all legislative requirements including licence, lease, health & safety, fire risk, landlords consent procedure, collaboration with building services, sub contractors, beyond bricks and mortar and best practice in general. 3FTE Community Development Officers which support the provision of Community Centres and Friends/Community Groups as detailed in the appendices attached.

2. Briefing/main body of report

- 2.1 The section has many years of experience engaging with communities across Swansea and encouraging contribution and participation. There is a requirement to understand the unique needs of areas and have staff with the expertise of working with the most hard to reach. The unique partnership agreement developed between the Council and communities is a valuable asset that can deliver direct benefits, cost effectively to local communities.
- 2.2 Community Development Section, given the limited resource, act as community enablers to support groups and empower the volunteers to look at;
 - Ensuring the voice of the local community is heard in relation to the management of community buildings, parks and improvement of facilities
 - Fundraising for improvements to buildings, parks equipment and events
 - Developing partnerships with local businesses, agencies, voluntary sector and others e.g. Beyond Bricks & Mortar
 - Ensuring all legislative and governance procedures are carried out and continually monitored
- 2.3 Community involvement is a very important aspect of achieving and maintaining high standards within Swansea's parks. It is a major factor in our efforts to win Green Flag Awards.
- 2.4 There have been a number of successes which will be tabled and detailed at the scrutiny session. Key to all are Volunteering which has proven to have the ability to encourage the most excluded to engage, helping to increase confidence, improve skills and build capacity, thereby improving employability, reducing social exclusion, contributing to physical health and wellbeing.

- 2.5 Financial investment in community centres and parks have been significant over the last two years, due to external funding, beyond bricks & mortar, 3rd party investment and by the groups themselves. Buildings have benefited from kitchens, toilets, flooring, internal/external painting, windows, general refurbishment and parks investment has been substantial with new playground equipment, MUGAs, events and family days and planting of new trees and shrubs.
- 2.6 There are 19 football pitches who are now self-managing together with 16 bowling greens detailed attached (**Appendix D**).
- 2.7 Friends of Oystermouth Castle is a Constituted charitable group with 7 Trustees and over 30 members. Their role is to provide access and presentation at Oystermouth Castle, which is a scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade1 listed building owned by the Council. The charity promotes the history and heritage of the site to visitors and provides a venue for local schools, colleges and universities.
- 2.8 Currently all voluntary management committees have the opportunity to access the Council's internal training courses, IT, basic health & safety, fire risk assessment bespoke training to the volunteer and community centres which was compiled by the section and health & safety team. With the support of the development officer committees have applied for external funding to run food & hygiene and first aid courses. Each committee is given a Building Induction Manual outlining roles and responsibilities, insurance, licence and health & safety and fire risk specific information. This would be something the section would be keen to offer to other community groups.

3. Conclusions/Key Points Summary

- 3.1 In summary Community Centres, Parks, Oystermouth Castle and other open spaces exist with the purpose of meeting the needs of users within their community. The challenge for these groups is to adapt to change and look at alternative avenues for funding, whilst sources of funding are reducing.
- 3.2 Previous consultation has highlighted the essential need for continued officer support and advice, in essence a partnership approach between Council and voluntary groups. The community development service has been substantially reduced over current years, but is evident that the unique partnership that exists is a valuable one that can deliver direct benefits to local communities.
- 3.3 Preventative approach to a number of ageing well outcomes is being delivered through the network of buildings. The team ensure an improved understanding of the Ageing Well Strategy with those that direct and manage the facility timetables and bookings.
- 3.4 By continuing to provide strategic support to create, improve and sustain effective community led voluntary management committees and friends of parks which are of a high quality, responsive local structure the section directly play a part in the transformation & future Council development.

3.5 It is essential for the future viability of any community asset that it clearly provides services and facilities for its community. Our buildings, open spaces and parks are the heart of a community and provide physical and social space where community interaction takes place. They are one of the key building blocks of community and appropriate facilities are an essential part of the community development process, especially in the current financial climate. Importantly, they can and do provide a social function and focus to help sustain the life of a community, either by virtue of the particular service it provides and/or as a meeting place and venue for social and health & wellbeing gatherings. It is often difficult to quantify the degree of benefit and value however, in cases where there is a lack of facilities the loss is capable of having a significant adverse impact in terms of community vitality and cohesiveness. We cannot underestimate the value of volunteering.

4. Legal implications

4.1 The licences outline obligations on the “Management Committee” as well as outlining duties on the “Council”.

5. Finance (if required)

None.

Glossary of terms: *Please add glossary of terms if you are using acronyms*

Background papers: *none*

Appendices: Appendix A – Community Centres
Appendix B – Friends of Parks
Appendix C – Community Centre Licence
Appendix D - Football/Bowling Greens