

Notes from the Woolwell Centre Working Group Meeting on Tuesday 14th July at 7pm held via Zoom

Present: Councillors Nicky Hopwood (NH) [Chair] , Larry Taylor (LT), Lynn Tamsett-White (LTW) and Paul Blight (PB)

Councillors discussed the request from the WCRT for a further grant of £14,000 and a summary of the points is as follows:

Cllrs were all in agreement that the Centre is an important part of the community and that they would not wish to see it close. There are some concerns that it doesn't have the same community feel as it used to and that this could be improved.

All agreed that it was likely always to need some funding from the PC, which they thought was reasonable, but that they would like to see a forward plan for how it can become much more self-sufficient. The previous PC had not maintained the building properly and they agreed that it had been important for this PC to provide appropriate funding to get it back to a good condition.

Some cllrs considered that the PC could not keep funding only this resource as other organisations might want to benefit from PC funding.

If the PC took the Centre back in-house then a new Trust would have to be formed with the Chair of the PC also acting as Chair of the Trust. This would not be straightforward to do and it was agreed that there was little difference between doing this and continuing with the present arrangement. NH also said that she was against the idea of the PC running the Centre.

The cost of the Centre was still going to be high if it the building was not open and therefore it was important to help it remain open and functioning.

All agreed that they would like to see a business or continuity plan from the Centre to understand its future plans and how the Centre will become sustainable financially. There was a question over the reserves policy and what that is and the high staffing costs.

All agreed that, if it hadn't been for the Covid situation, the Trust would not be asking for this money from the PC and there was a lot of sympathy for that. Concerns were also expressed about what would happen if there is another lockdown and more potential income is lost.

All agreed that they would like to see the Centre marketed and advertised to maximise use and income.

It was noted that one of the trustees has recently resigned.

There is uncertainty amongst councillors about the liabilities on the PC. For example, if the PC gives them this grant and then they run out of money again, what are our liabilities as an authority or as a PC? If the Trust fails then do the staff have a claim against the Trust? There is confusion about the legal relationship between Trust and PC and this needs to be clarified.

Cllrs had concerns about the PC grant money being used for running costs eg staff wages as this is not sustainable.

Cllrs all agreed that they would like to have a meeting in person with trustees, if possible, as this would be a better way of speaking to each other. They would also like trustees to be able to make an application for a grant as they recognise that they need the money urgently.

All agreed that they realise how hard the staff work and how dedicated they are to the Centre. None of the information that cllrs have asked for should cast any doubt on this.

The following was therefore sent to trustees and a meeting will be set up in due course.

“The Woolwell Centre Working Group met on Tuesday to discuss the request from the Trust for a further grant of £14,000. As a result of that meeting, councillors recognised that they would like to know more about the relationship between the two bodies so that they can better understand the responsibilities and liabilities that they have towards the Trust and towards the Centre.

They would therefore like to invite the Trust to make a formal grant application to the PC. Given that it is for a substantial amount of money, they request that the following documents are included with the application: 3 years’ of audited accounts; a current business plan; and the Trust Memorandum/Articles of Association.

Once that is received and the WG has had a chance to read all the paperwork, they would like to meet in person with the trustees to discuss it in more detail.”

Councillor Nicky Hopwood

Chair