

## **Notes from the Woolwell Centre Working Group Meeting - Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 at 7pm via Zoom**

Present:

Members of the BPC Woolwell Centre WG - Councillors Nicky Hopwood (Chair), Lynn Tamsett-White, Larry Taylor and Paul Blight

Members of the Woolwell Community Resource Trust – Barrie Spencer, Steven Marsh, Suzanne Marsh, Charlie Huitson

Woolwell Centre Staff – Carole Spencer (Centre Manager), Wendy Haymes

The Chair introduced the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and giving up their time.

She explained that the PC had requested the meeting with trustees because the Trust was asking for financial support and it was important for the PC to ask questions and consider the request thoroughly.

Lynn asked a question about staff costs for July and how they would be paid given that there was no predicted income for that month. Wendy explained that all staff had been furloughed with the exception of the Centre Manager (CM). The July staff costs therefore represented the costs of the CM and the part time cleaner, who is being brought back to work to prepare the Centre for opening with a deep clean. Lynn queried why a deep clean was necessary, given that the Centre had been closed and the CM explained that there had been relatively high footfall in the Centre recently with a variety of work being carried out and she would not be happy to open it again without that measure.

The Chair asked about the bill of £5,611.74 for HMRC. The CM explained that this was the tax and NI contribution for the busiest quarter of the year, covering the Christmas period. The bill would not normally cause a problem because it would be paid from income but the current circumstances made it impossible to pay in one go. She has negotiated a 12-month repayment plan with HMRC.

The Centre had been awarded a £25,000 grant from SHDC in April, which Barrie explained had been fought for as the Centre did not immediately qualify. SHDC had been very supportive of this and the Centre has also now been given 100% rate relief.

The Chair asked if there were any outstanding debtors to the Centre. The CM replied that the gas and electricity bills need to be paid but that instalments have been arranged at 0% interest. The use of power had been greatly reduced during lockdown which was an advantage for future billing.

The Chair asked if a charitable trust was the best option for managing the Centre. Barrie replied that they took professional advice in 1996 and the decision to create a charitable trust was taken because it was the best option at the time, partly because of the rate relief which was worth a considerable amount of money. He is in favour of reviewing this arrangement. He also has some concerns about the fact that individual trustees are responsible financially for the Centre's activities.

The Chair then took a more in-depth look at staff costs and the following information was explained:

Staffing had been reduced by 1 F/T and 2 P/T members of staff and the Chair expressed her sympathy for those members of staff.

Staff on 0 hours contracts had been brought back for work as required.

The Chair asked why the 2 most expensive members of staff had been brought back ie the Centre Manager and Assistant Centre Manager. The CM explained that, unless those members of staff were brought back to work, they would have to be made redundant. The Trust does not have enough money to pay the redundancy cost given their length of service. The CM also explained that there was still a great deal of work now, especially as the work of the 2 P/T members of staff who had been made redundant needed to be covered.

The Chair asked why there were 5 P/T members of staff being brought back.

One of them is the cleaner, which is essential work. Three are the am/pm Club staff and the Club can't be run with any fewer staff than this or it would be in breach of Ofsted regulations. It is also the case that the staffing for this club has already been streamlined as much as possible.

The Chair asked about the staff costs for September and October, which are predicted to be £7,000 but with no bookings expected – how does this work?

Wendy explained the staffing costs as follows:

In July and August, there are no more staff being paid than there have been during lockdown but the Centre has to start paying certain costs which have until now been covered by the furlough scheme. So, in July and August there will be 1 F/T and 1 P/T member of staff. In August, the Centre starts to pay the employer's NI contributions and any pension costs. In September, there will be 1 F/T, 1 P/T (Cleaner) and 3 am/pm staff. In addition, the Centre then has to start paying 10% of the furlough wages + NI and pension contributions. In October all of the above is true but, in addition, the Centre has to pay an additional 20% of the furlough costs. From November, the furlough scheme finishes and then all staff costs have to be paid by the Centre.

Lynn asked whether or not it was cost effective to bring back the 3 P/T am/pm staff. The CM explained that the usual income from the Club was £5,000 per month and that, although this income is likely to be reduced for the time being, it was still an important source of income. In addition, when schools go back in September, it will be a necessary service. The Chair agreed that the Club is a really important part of the Centre and of the community and she would like to see it start again. Lynn asked if the Club would be restricted on capacity. The CM replied that it is hard to tell at the moment because the Government guidelines keep changing but that this will almost certainly be the case. Paul asked if this would still be the case by September and the CM said that she expected that it might be and that the numbers may have to be cut, with a corresponding rise in the cost to users.

Paul asked if Covid costs had been included in the expenditure figures for the Centre. Barrie explained that they had and that the hope was that this would reduce over time.

The Chair asked about applying a Covid charge to users. The CM is keeping an eye on this and thinks that it may have to happen. She has spoken to hirers and most are in favour of a cost per head as a Covid charge: they are willing to pay to feel safe.

The Chair moved on to Appendix 2.

It was clarified that this chart shows the payment of arrears, not including staff costs.

Larry asked about the payments to PRS. The CM explained that this is a charge to the Performing Rights Society which licences the playing of music in the Centre. The charge is based on the last set of accounts so this year's charge is relatively high. The invoice has not yet been sent but it is a legal requirement to pay it. The CM is hoping that the cost can be paid in instalments as the Centre has a

good record of paying on time. The Chair commented that everyone is struggling and that every effort should be made to pay bills.

The disparity between the staff costs and the very low predicted income was discussed and the Chair made the point that, if this was a business, questions would be asked about whether or not it could continue. However, it was not an option to close the Centre and all present agreed with this. Barrie confirmed that the low predicted income was based on the situation at the time of writing, which was just before the latest lockdown easing. It assumed a case of there being no bookings for the rest of the year – a worst case scenario.

Paul asked about the credit card payments. The CM explained that these are the lease of the credit card machine and transaction fees, which are more essential than ever now when contactless payments are so important.

Lynn observed that the Covid costs and things like enhanced cleaning are expensive and the CM agreed, saying that the Centre cannot afford to bear the costs of extra cleaning products, greater water usage etc. The costs to hirers will have to increase otherwise the Centre will make a loss.

Larry asked about the possibility of external grants and funding. Advice had been received from Devon Communities Together that funding may well be coming online from sources such as them and DCC but nothing concrete was yet in place. The CM said that they were applying for any funding possible and had recently been given £250 by SHDC for PPE.

The Chair asked about the future opportunities for the Centre. She said that Derriford Leisure Centre had closed down and that many wedding venues would suffer similarly. She thought that the Centre made an excellent venue and wondered how they were now going to promote this. She hadn't seen any marketing or advertising. She considered that there was an opportunity to tell people about the Centre and raise its profile. The CM explained that she found it difficult to start something like this when she still has no idea about the capacity of the spaces.

Steve Marsh said that he thought this was going off the point. He considered that the PC had two options: either to consider making a donation to help the Centre survive or not. If the Centre were a business, it would be closing and either the PC pays the money or the Centre closes. If the Trust did not survive then the PC would have to run the facility without the benefits of charitable status and TUPE across the staff.

The Chair expressed her disappointment with this viewpoint and the way in which it was expressed as she thought it did not reflect the cooperative nature of the meeting so far and sounded like a threat. She considered it appropriate to ask about marketing as the future of the Centre was an important factor in making a decision to give more money.

Councillors considered that they had now received answers to all of their questions and the Chair thanked everyone for their time.

A date was then set for a meeting of the WG to review those answers and consider a recommendation to the PC. The WG will meet on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July at 7pm via Zoom.

Councillor Nicky Hopwood

Chair