Community Development Best Value Review

January 2004

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1. Summary

1.1.   The Best Value Review of Community Development deals only with community development and community centres within the Community Education and Development Division. Since April 2003 when the work began, the Review has produced a Project Plan and a Scope Report. The Vision Report is the third document in the review process. An Options and Implementation Plan will be the next and final document and will include financial details.

1.2.   At the Vision stage the service compared itself to other similar local authorities, consulted widely with stakeholders, assessed the issues in others providing the service and presented its findings for public scrutiny. This work produced some of the most useful insights into how other authorities operate in this area.

1.3.   Straight comparison with other similar authorities proved difficult because provision and interpretation varied so much. The absence of national standards for community development served only to compound the matter. Local authorities increasingly recognise the value of community development in helping achieve successful outcomes to local strategic objectives and Government programmes, as well as community well being. A number of authorities have established a community development focus or unit with a council wide remit to fully exploit and co-ordinate this situation. A seemingly long-standing trend of devolving local authority community centres to local community organisations was evident in many areas. The nature and amount other authorities spend on community development was also too variable to make straight comparisons. A rough calculation shows Luton spends more than most but in the case of community centres it's arguable that it also gets a better service for it's money. Some authorities with community centres do spend very little on them however detailed enquiries indicate that outcomes were often poor as a result. Approximately £1.5m of Luton's £3m budget is spent on community development which for the most part is the management and staffing costs of the fieldwork, which does seem high compared to others.

1.4.   There is no 'real market' for community centres. The only organisations generally able and willing to run community centres are local authorities or voluntary organisations. Outside the council there are no existing organisations in Luton able to undertake this task at present. A number of other authorities have devolved community centres to community associations and this would seem an appropriate model for Luton but will require us to set them up, a community development task in itself.

1.5. Thorough consultation has taken place involving centre users, non-users, partners and staff. Two successful challenge events were also organised which were attended by local residents, service users and non users, statutory and voluntary agencies, staff and elected members. Overall those consulted believed that community development played an invaluable role in supporting community life in Luton and should be maintained. There was a clear message that community centres are popular and needed, and that communities ought to be more involved in their management.

> **The Vision for community development and community centres is to restructure the existing service to form a new unit which would work corporately at the centre with responsibility for community development and key strategies across the Council, and to devolve existing council maintained community centres to new local community organizations with some staffing and financial support.**

1.6. There was strong support for the Vision, although inevitably there were many questions about how to get from here to there. The detail of how the latter is tackled will be dealt with in next stage, the Options and Implementation Plan, which is due in February 2004; comment is made (Page 17 Q.12).

2. Services covered by the Review

2.1. The primary focus of the Review is the structure performance of community centres and community development work.

3. Key issues

3.1. Cost of the service

3.1.1. The provision of community centres in Luton is believed to be expensive in comparison to other authorities. Available data is limited.

3.1.2. Tasks
- Compare against like providers.
- Analyse data and identify main areas of cost.
- Identify gaps in existing information.
- Compare against good practice in other authorities.
- Identify potential savings measures.

3.1.3. Methods
- Gather and analyse existing information.
- Compare against others.
- Identify high cost areas.
- Quality of existing facilities.
- Alternative methods of provision.
- Current community development practice.
- Income and expenditure.
- Cross cutting issues.

3.2. Quality of Existing Facilities

3.2.1. Each community centre is unique. All have existed for some years and suffer various extents by a lack of ongoing investment.

3.2.2. Tasks
- Upgrade or undertake condition surveys.
- Estimate the cost of bringing centres up to standard.

3.2.3. Methods
- Physical inspection.
- Estimate of costs.

3.3. Alternative methods of provision

3.3.1. Initial comparisons show that considerable sources of new external funding – and consequent savings to the Council could be achieved through an alternative method of provision.

3.3.2. Tasks
- Research converting to other forms of community management such as community associations or trusts.
- Examine the potential of joint use/management of existing relevant provision e.g. schools.
- Examine the potential in the 'Extended Schools' initiative.

3.3.3. Method
- Assemble existing knowledge on Community Associations etc.
- Examine the work of other authorities, The Community Development Foundation and Community Matters.
- Discuss options with the Extended Schools Strategy Group.

3.4. Current Community Development practice

3.4.1. The practice of community development has remained rooted in the Councils community centres together with a small team of community development workers for several years. The role of community development thus is largely perceived as being about community centres and less as a way of working with communities across all Council departments. An assessment of how community development is effective in meeting corporate and local needs and what would be necessary to improve performance is needed.

3.4.2. Tasks
- Analyse and compare existing activities against corporate and service targets.
- Examine alternative approaches and any gaps.
- Discuss with users and non-users whether existing needs are being met.
- Examine the issues in community use of schools.
- Examine how community involvement could contribute to greater community development.

- Examine the issues of opportunities for increased community involvement in community centres and increased sources of income.
- Examine the role of staff, particularly community development staff, in relation to effectiveness in achieving community development and corporate targets.

3.4.3. Methods
- Task group to review all service activities.
- Assess and compare impact of Neighbourhood Renewal work.
- Task group to ensure consultation on current practice with stakeholders e.g. users, non-users, staff, voluntary organisations, community groups, elected members.

3.5. Income and Expenditure

3.5.1. A detailed review of expenditure, income from charges and other sources has not been undertaken before. A review now will establish strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

3.5.2. Tasks
- Review the scale of charges in comparison to other Council facilities and other authorities.
- Seek the views of users and non-users.
- Consider the impact of external funding.
- Consider the allocation of other grants.
- Identify ideas for increasing external income and cost reduction.

3.5.3. Methods
- Task group to review existing provision.
- Consultation with users, non-users, staff and other local community organisations.
- Improvement Group.

3.6. Communication and Involvement

3.6.1. There is a considerable opportunity to involve key stakeholders in providing information and ideas. This will be an important priority for the review.

3.6.2. Tasks
- Develop a consultation plan.
- Identify ideas for improvement and change.
- Review relevant policy and practice.

3.6.3.   Methods
- Consult key stakeholders.
- Use varied means of consultation.
- Identify gaps.

3.7.   Cross Cutting Issues

3.7.1.   Community Development is a cross cutting way of working with communities and local issues, in this capacity Luton's service has limited impact. An assessment of how this can be improved is needed. Community Development needs to be assessed in relation to:

- Vision 2010.
- Neighbourhood Renewal.
- New Deal for Communities.
- Youth Service.
- Adult Education.
- Regeneration.
- Environment.
- Housing.
- Social Services.
- Education.
- Leisure, Libraries and Culture.

3.7.2.   Tasks
- What role does community development play in these service areas?
- Does current practice meet the community and corporate agendas?
- How do we establish divisional objectives?
- The role of the voluntary sector.
- Provision of support to community groups.
- Good practice and policy.

3.7.3.   Method
- Cross service consultation.
- Key stakeholders' consultation.
- Community consultation.
- Comparison with other authorities.
- Discussion with national bodies like Community Development Foundation and Community Matters.

4. Information Sources

The following Local Authorities were identified for the research carried out by our Consultants (Strategic Urban Futures Limited) as being suitable sources of information	Barking Blackburn Bradford Brighton Bristol Durham Halton Southampton Southwark Watford
The Reference Group who have challenged the research and applied constructive criticism	Members of the Council Senior Officers from a number of Service Providers The Director of Lifelong Learning
The Review Group who have provided the information for consideration	Members of Staff Unison Community Development Foundation Community Matters Best Value Review Team Officers
Authorities who have provided information to the Council to enable further comparison of methods of working	Hampshire County Council Wolverhampton City Council Halton Borough Council Derry City Council Bracknell Forest Borough Council Swansea City Council
Additional work has been done in the above area through consultation with	Community Development Foundation Community Matters
People/Partners who have been consulted about the Best Value Review	Community Centre Users (684) Community Centre User Groups (125) Non Users (543) Unison The Community Development Foundation Community Matters Internal and external Partners
Property Related Matters	A full Report on the Council's present Community Centres has been prepared by Luton Borough Council's Capital Asset Management Department.
Financial Information	Budgetary information has been investigated and compiled by the Lifelong Learning Accountancy Section.

5. Analysis of Key Issues – Critical Questions and Answers

As the Review proceeded the number of key issues identified increased over and above the original list in the Scope Report. It was decided to present the expanded list in a question and answer format.

Q1
Does Luton Council have a policy for community development?
A1
No but it does have community development workers and a sizeable budget. Whether a local authority has a policy and or a strategy largely depends on the scale of local community activity, the variety of Government programmes, the level of investment and the individual authorities grasp of the issues. There are a number of key plans in Luton such as the Vision 2010, the Best Value Performance Plan and Corporate Strategy, and the Community Plan that share goals and values common to community development. These could provide a framework for a community development policy or framework that would focus on the Council's own services as well as partnership working.

Q2
Do we need a policy?
A2
Yes, or at least some kind of agreed Council wide understanding or framework as to why we do the work, what the scope is and what the standards ought to be; assuming of course the Council wishes to continue providing the service! We spend large sums of money on the service, employ staff to do community development work, have numerous partnerships with community organisations and support a number of key Government programmes that depend on a community development input for successful outcomes. Being clear about why we do it, the relationship with other departments and what we expect as a result is essential to getting the best out of the resource and monitoring performance. In addition our consultation has shown that our partners value the Council's commitment to community development principles very highly but at the same time recognise that the way the service is currently arranged does not deliver on these commitments.

Q3
What does community development mean and do?
A3
Not unlike many other authorities community development in Luton has grown over the years on the back of short term externally funded programmes and neighbourhood projects. The Council has not determined why it supports the work, what its expectations are and what activities are included. A 'universal' definition of community development based on the Standing Conference on Community Development definition is given below. The service aspires to this

definition but it is noted that no definition has ever been formally debated and agreed within the service.

"Community development is the practice of enabling people to work together to improve the conditions of their lives on a local or other community-interest basis. Working mainly with community groups, voluntary organisations and public agencies, it empowers individuals, strengthens communities and improves the capacity of community groups and organisations to meet there own objectives and thereby also to contribute to the objectives of local authorities, health authorities and the individual departments within them."

- *Community development aims to produce:*
- *More effective community groups and voluntary organisations*
- *Better access to community activities for people liable to social exclusion*
- *More volunteering*
- *Better dialogue between local residents and public agencies*
- *More community involvement in governance e.g. through Local Strategic Partnerships area committees, neighbourhood forums etc.*
- *Greater capacity of the community and voluntary sector to deliver appropriate public services*
- *More social capital*
- *More effective and representative community workers*
- *More community participation in neighbourhood renewal*
- *More community enterprise/local economic initiatives*

It is generally understood that community development is not so much a council service per se, as a cross cutting approach contributing to a number of services and programmes by the use of a particular set of methods and principles.

The Review looked only at community development within the Community Education and Development Division. This includes twelve full time community development work posts, six of whom are seniors with part management responsibility for a community centre, and twelve community centres. Most of the fieldwork is neighbourhood based with local groups and projects. Much of the quality and quantity of this work needs further consideration since full potential is rarely achieved. However where the work has been well managed with clear aims and objectives some excellent outcomes have been achieved (**See Case Studies - Appendix 0**). The expertise of the staff group is inconsistent, sickness absence is often high and recruitment of experienced staff is very difficult. At a strategic level in Luton, community development is not seen as a significant player in any of the key corporate strategies, although ironically the work on the ground invariably contributes to successful outcomes.

> *For example the anticipated 'fall out' locally from the 9/11 terrorist attack in America, was successfully 'managed' by community development staff because of their community contacts and understanding of local networks; a significant contribution to community cohesion!*

The historical tie up between community centres and community development has produced some good work but for the most part the former has soaked up all the available staff time, energy and resources of the latter. Whilst closely related, the essential purpose of both is quite different.

> *Essentially community centres provide a range of activities and support to the local community. Community development on the other hand will be interested less in the actual provision of service and more in the capacity and involvement of the community in determining the policy and direction of the service. The act of bringing local people together to create an organisation to run a community centre is in itself of course community development.*

Q4
Do we need community development at all? What would happen if we got rid of it?
A4 *(see also National Context Appendix P)*

Yes, in the Reviews opinion. Experience and research says clearly that local authorities and Government increasingly recognise the value of community development and are giving it a more strategic central role in achieving successful goals across a range of community based programmes and council services. Community development processes often support many of Luton's services, programmes and corporate objectives. If this were to be done in a more consistent and planned way across the Council the benefits would be considerably increased.

> *Community development plays an invaluable role in Luton by supporting community cohesion, building community capacity and networks, forming new partnerships and organisations, promoting involvement in democratic activities and service provision, facilitating inward investment and helping local communities articulate needs and aspirations. The cross cutting potential of community development in the context of Council services and other sectors is highlighted by this list.*

However as previously mentioned, the present service structure needs to change to enable the needs of neighbourhoods, community centres and the Council to be met more effectively. It is argued that if there was no community development in Luton the above list would be significantly reduced and many worthwhile community initiatives diminished or lost. The opportunity to achieve improved outcomes for Council objectives and wider community programmes would also

be lost. The ability to participate in a number of Government programmes would be limited and the Council's inter-face with the local community would also be diminished

The Review conducted an independent assessment of ten other (10) similar authorities, looking at how they run community centres and how they organise community development. Of the ten comparator authorities community development plays a major role in the development of the key strategies such as the Local Strategic Partnership and Community Plan in eight (8). Most have or are involved in identifying ways to devolve community centres although no particularly significantly models stand out. Where a community development capacity has been established the contribution to the Council as a whole does appear to be of considerable benefit and where community centres have been devolved with no resources the outcome is often poor. There is general agreement about what community development work does but variation in what's included under the heading. For example some include grant aid and responsibility for key local strategies, others do not.

> *Our vision for community development in Luton is that the present team be restructured into a new centrally based unit working corporately with strategic responsibility for key Council objectives, inter-departmental and cross sector working. This will create a focused Council wide resources and will achieve substantial savings. This is not a function that any other authority out sources since it is specifically to do with supporting key council aims and objectives.*

Q5
In what ways are community centres different from other community buildings such schools, leisure centres and church halls?
A5
See Appendix K, also 11.4.1 (page 38) to 11.4.8 (page 40), for detailed response. We believe, in line with national opinion in the field that there are significant differences between schools, leisure centres and community centres that justify the continuation of the existing centres in Luton. We do not rule out future developments where new centres include multi-service facilities, indeed this is a desirable complimentary development.

Q6
What are the advantages of Community Associations over Trusts?
A6
See Appendix 'K'. "Different methods of voluntary organisations running community buildings".

Q7
How do other authorities run community centres?
A7
See Table 2 - page 72
We looked at several other authorities to see what they did and the result was quite a varied picture. Some don't have any centres, others provide them themselves and yet others have outsourced them to community organisations. In Southampton for example the Council own nineteen (19) centres, eighteen (18) are devolved to local community associations. The Council lease the centres to the Community Authorities at a peppercorn rent. There is an annual budget of £165,700 to cover day-to-day repairs and maintenance for all the centres. The Council does not provide any staffing in centres. All the centres are expected to be financially independent. Centres keep any lettings income they make. Southampton say this arrangement isn't working too well and are reviewing it. They say that it's too tough for many CA's and are looking for ways to make the arrangement less burdensome, possible by decentralising some council services to centres to help cover costs. They do not appear to have expectations of CA's other than to keep the building open.

The London Borough of Barking has about twenty (20) centres, all devolved to community associations. The Council do not provide any staffing or operational costs. CA's run the centres weekdays and keep all the income. The Council covers the weekends and keeps the income. The Council provides £750,000 annually to cover repairs and maintenance for all centres. Barking say, similarly to Southampton, that it is proving tough for most CA's and they are also currently reviewing the situation and are likely to recommend that CA's take over weekends but with no extra resources. They say it's likely that only about six will take up the challenge and if nothing else transpires they will close the other centres in a year. A borough wide Federation of CA's is being established for mutual support and development. They also appear not to have any expectations of CA's other than to keep the building open.

Watford Borough Council directly manages five centres, supports two others in the community and has a joint arrangement with Leisure to provide two others. They pay the staffing and all running costs of the centres they manage. As yet we have not been able to obtain further financial details. Watford says of the current arrangement that they are looking at how they can devolve centres to local community organisations and further reduce costs. The total budget for centres also includes two or three support staff at the centre. They were at pains to emphasise the need for the Council to continue with some sort of core funding and staffing of centres. They have no community development workers.

Q8

Why don't we hand them over to the community without a budget or staffing?

A8

Some of the authorities we looked at have devolved community centres to community associations, with minimal resources. In some cases no financial or staffing resources have been provided at all. The Review concluded that on balance this approach would not be in Luton's best interest.

Further detailed discussion with the comparator authorities indicated that without some Council support the performance and sustainability of centres was often poor, with limited or no continuing development.

A local community organizing itself to acquire or build a community centre from scratch, is likely to be differently motivated to one being asked to take over a formerly Council run centre. Especially if the latter comes with none of the resources previously allocated to the centre by the Council. There are examples of centres that flourish with minimal Council input but on the whole none compare to the Luton situation.

The Review acknowledges that many community centres nationally are not resourced by the local authority. In Luton's case however it would be very unlikely that local communities could be persuaded to take on centres without some financial and staffing input from the Council. Consultation supports this view.

The Review concludes that the opportunities and benefits created for local people through this network of centres is worth continued support but with significant changes in how centres are operated. The Review is able to show that the quality and quantity of provision can be improved whilst overall significant savings can be achieved.

Q9

Why don't we just close them down?

A9

As borne out by our consultation and compared to some other authorities Luton's centres provide a very good service, one that local people want and one that we can build on. Years of Council and community investment would be wasted simply to give them up now. We believe closure would be greeted with great dismay and loss of trust in the Council. The Best Value Review consultation gave a clear indication of the popularity of local centres. We also believe that the centres contribute significantly to community well being and cohesion.

> *Luton's network of centres provides a great opportunity to promote and strengthen local communities. New comers to towns like Luton, including businesses, often express interest in the availability of community facilities such as this.*

Q10
So what's the future for community centres Luton?
A10
Also see Vision Targets page 36.
The existing network of centres is well established, popular with local people and provides an excellent basis from which to promote community involvement and neighbourhood renewal. Luton's centres contribute significantly to the well being of local communities, as evidenced by the consultation results. By this we mean that centres provide a safe meeting place for local people, they provide access to a wide range of information about important public services, they stimulate and support local community action and services like play groups and adult learning, they create opportunities for training and volunteering, and for people to become involved in service provision and democratic activity. Little of this would happen without the support of the Council.

> *We have seen that some other authorities provide little support and have few expectations of their centres with the resultant limited outcomes.*

However, the service does cost more compared to some authorities and needs to progress and change but is unable to do so largely because of a lack of resources.

Our vision for community centres in Luton is simple but it will take time to achieve if we want a sustainable and quality outcome. We want to keep the Council involved but we need to change the way centres operate. The proposal involves establishing a community association for each centre, to take over the day-to-day management and development of the centre. The Council should continue to invest in the service by providing a small operational budget and a small core staff team (employed by the Council and seconded to the CA) for each centre. Detailed proposals are included in the Options and Implementation Plan.

> *The proposal achieves substantial savings but critically would provide the new CA's with the impetus and confidence to build on successes, help achieve Council and Government objectives, access new sources of external funding and generate greater local community involvement in service provision. CA's could also, where the capacity developed, provide a local focus for the co-ordination of neighbourhood renewal and partnership working*.

Centres would continue to be supported by community development staff but staff in the centres would be accountable to a centre management committee. An annual service level agreement (SLA) would be the means by which standards and outcomes would be agreed and monitored.

The process for achieving this will require a community development approach and could take between two and four years to complete a total transfer over to community association management. These community organisations do not of course exist, we will have to establish them. A few centres already have management committees that with support would be able to take this work forward reasonably quickly. The majority however will need considerable capacity building, training and support. This work would be a priority for the newly restructured community development unit, in partnership with local people, other Luton Borough Council departments and centre staff. In the event of it proving impossible to involve a local community in taking over a centre, the Council may consider running it itself, a consortium of existing voluntary organizations or closure.

Q11
What are the financial issues?
A11
See Table 1 - page 72. Also see A7
For a non-statutory service Luton's spend on community development is relatively high compared to other authorities. However comparisons of this kind can be misleading, certainly the picture nationally is varied and inconsistent. In Luton about 50% of the £3m budget goes on community development staffing and projects, and 50% on the staffing and running of community centres. £1m of the total is central re-charges. Increased future income from the Council is unlikely. This is more of an issue for community centres than community development. Community development works primarily on behalf of community organisations and is able to access external funding for their development more easily.

> *Community centres considerably improve their ability to access external funding if they are run by a voluntary organisation and not the Council*.

The Council would need to guarantee a basic budget even though centres already raise income from various sources now this is inadequate for what needs to be done. Centres should be allowed to keep the income they currently make from lettings. Several community associations competing for resources may create a risk of conflict and duplication, so we would recommend that a Luton federation of community associations be established to co-ordinate plans, resources and share information.

> *We calculate between 25% - 30% savings over two to three years with significant service improvements, by adopting our Vision for community development and community centres.*

Q12
How do we get from where we are now to making the Vision a reality?
A12
This can only be achieved in stages, the first of which is to devolve at least some, perhaps ultimately all, community centres to being run by suitable community organisations on behalf of the community as a whole. This has the dual purpose of freeing up the community development resource in the medium term but also building up the experience in leading community organisations.

The way in which this would be done, and the criteria to be applied to the transition stage, are therefore themselves an important part of the community development plan, and the short term strategy would be to devise a process and a service level agreement which embodies appropriate criteria. One pitfall to be avoided, especially in light of experience from the New Deal for Communities scheme, is to assume that community groups automatically act in the interest of the whole community, simply because they are community groups. There must be built in criteria and processes to ensure that any group given a major responsibility such as running a centre has the right ethos and processes to ensure, and to widen, full engagement of all sections of the relevant local population. It is also necessary to foster a wide range of smaller groups, and networks amongst groups, to generate continuing energy, formal and informal accountability and the emergence of new waves of residents to take responsibilities. In the current period Neighbourhood Renewal has a key role to play in these developments.

However, it is also important that the good community development work already taking place around the community centre bases is not lost.

> **Transition must therefore be handled sensitively so that local residents and community groups – from which ultimately the skills to run the centres must be drawn – do not feel that they are losing council support rather than gaining new opportunities.**

Q13
What is the quality and condition of the centres like?
A13
The interim property review (**see Appendix H**) is a limited review of the ten permanent community centres (plus references to Challney, Sundon, Dallow and proposed High Town centres) in the context of, and inclusion with the Best Value Review of Community Development. Once the Best Value review of the service has been agreed and approved, this property review element covering the community centres can be further refined to consider options and risks for the premises as part of an agreed strategy for community development and the role of community centres within this strategy.

Q14
How are the centres distributed across the town and what size are they?
A14
The community centres (including High Town, when built and Dallow) are unevenly distributed throughout the town both in terms of their geographic spread and their overall sizes, as illustrated in Appendix A.

The disparity is more pronounced in the way that some of the largest centres are closely located in a small area. This can be illustrated by the following:

- The total internal floor space of High Town (when built) and Dallow, are equivalent to 42% of the combined floor space of all the Council's twelve centres.
- High Town (1546m^2), Bury Park (1078m^2) and Dallow (950m^2) will be the 1st, 3rd and 4th largest centre respectively. These centres are in close proximity to each other and will constitute 38% of the total area of all the fourteen centres.
- 50% of the area within a half-mile radius of Dallow is within a half-mile radius of Farley and/or Bury Park.
- Another larger plan is available in the Best Value report that shows all the Council buildings in the town and also the location of over 100 properties that house community activities. Of particular relevance are those schools which are in close proximity to community centres and are being reimbursed for significant levels of use by groups (whether at nil cost to the Groups or at concessionary rates) using the school under the Council's School's Letting Policy. The impact of this 'unfair competition' is to be assessed.
- Plans of each of the wards are included in Part 2 of the Best Value Report at Appendix M.

As necessary work to community centre buildings, as other Council buildings, is deferred over the years due to budgetary constraints they suffer from accelerated physical obsolescence, as do other Council buildings. Of the £769K of expenditure (capital and revenue) identified in the recent condition surveys of the centres only £62K has been provisionally included in next years capital programme.

Overall the repair cost, when divided by the combined gross internal floor areas of the centres, equates to a figure of £132 per square metre. This compares favourably with a rebuild cost of £1000 plus per square metre. Saints and Lewsey have particularly high repair costs relative to their area at £261m^2 and £251m^2 respectively.

The programme of work on community centres (except for Limbury which is yet to be programmed), for compliance with DDA, is expected to be completed by 31st December 2003.

All of the twelve centres achieved a satisfactory score (see Appendices C and C1). Each achieves an overall score exceeding 67% of the available points. This means that each centre, on the basis of the detailed criteria in Appendix C1, could be made fit for the purpose with relatively small effort and expense. If the seven different categories in the summary in Appendix C were weighted this might have produced lower scores**.**

The Council's buildings, when assessed in terms of room bookings for the financial year 2002/3, achieved low overall percentage occupancy. These ranged from 24% at Hockwell Ring (due to one of the halls being out of commission due to a serious fire) to 72% at Raynham Way. These figures represent an unsatisfactory level of use for the buildings and an uneconomic use of a valuable corporate resource particularly for the larger centres.

Although 8 or the 10 permanent Council centres have been built within the last 30 years all display varying degrees of functional and economic obsolescence. This is manifest particularly in the low ratios of areas available for hire against the gross internal areas of each building (see Appendix G).

Also the buildings have varying degrees of flexibility in the way they can be used as community centres. The floor layouts are in most cases inflexible. The largely traditional construction of the centres means that the potential for modifying the internal layout of the buildings (both for responding to changing community demand over time and/or for other non community uses i.e. internal, Council services, partnership arrangements etc) is severely limited i.e. it would be expensive/uneconomic to implement major adaptations.

Overall energy costs for the centres are high (**see Appendix F**). There is a wide variance in the unit energy costs between the centres. The high heating costs are due to a combination of factors e.g. inherently most of the buildings have poor insulation, combined in some with inadequate/unsuitable/aging/uneconomic heating systems e.g. oil. The poor insulation factors, which are costly to remedy, are more significant than inefficiencies arising from the heating systems and controls. 'Invest to save' measures should have been explored but the outcomes may be marginal.

Q15
What is the future relationship between Community Associations and Trusts?
A15
There is a good relationship between the existing Community Development Trusts and the Community Development Service, indeed the service has been a significant contributor to their development to date. The service will continue to provide community development work support when needed and Trust staff are encouraged to work as part of the Divisions area based teams. The general view of the Review is that Trusts ought to be regarded as part of the network of community centres in Luton. Trusts should be invited to be members of a Luton Federation should one be established. The Council may also wish to consider whether or not a resource allocation similar to that being proposed for existing Council owned centres should be made to existing Trusts.

6. Challenge/Consultation/Comparison/Competition

6.1. Challenge

6.1.1. There are many developments in national policy (e.g. Modernising Local Government, Community Planning, Active Communities, Community Cohesion, and Neighbourhood Renewal) which depend on community development and involvement principles for their quality and success. Similarly there is a wide range of government funding opportunities for the Community & Voluntary Sector (CVS) sector designed to enable capacity building and greater community involvement in the development and provision of services. Effective engagement with the many diverse government-led social inclusion and equalities initiatives also demands a community development approach to be employed. Community development is not a statutory obligation.

6.1.2. All of these point to a need for community development at policy, strategic and operational levels to ensure joined-up working that can achieve the Council's vision in line with the range of current government initiatives.

6.1.3. The Council has a history of providing and of developing community services through its Community Education and Development Division, which also includes the Youth Service, Student Support and Adult Education. Work is undertaken in collaboration with other Council services such as Regeneration. Elsewhere across the Council, various community services are provided through Lifelong Learning, Social Services, Community Services, Libraries, Leisure, Housing, often in partnership with external agencies such as the PCT, or national programmes such as Sure Start and Sports Action Zone (SAZ).

6.1.4. In many English authorities there is no distinctive community development service or department. Community services may be delivered through Leisure, Regeneration, Housing, Education and Neighbourhood Renewal departments or units.

6.1.5. One major challenge is to make a meaningful comparison with other authorities who do provide community development services in terms of the cost of the service provided. Table 1 (page 72) suggests that Luton's cost of

£15,627 per one thousand (1000) population is higher than almost all of the ten main comparator authorities. However, not all our comparator's costs are included (e.g. Bristol's staffing costs are not included in their Centre Costs and Blackburn, Bradford and Southwark's Centre Costs were not used). Similarly the impact and use of grants may not be the same in each authority. Nevertheless, the review team are concerned at the apparently high comparative cost of the service and are looking at ways to reduce this.

6.1.6. As the report explains, for historical reasons and in common with the national picture, there is little performance information currently available that we could use either to assess how good the service provided is, or to compare ourselves with other local authorities. Consequently, we cannot be sure whether we are providing a high cost service or if we are paying for a high quality service. In either case we need to examine what is required and we can afford to provide both in terms of resources needed to support centres and to ensure the viability of those centres if locally run. The issue of relative obsolescence and suitability also needs to be addressed, as does that of the effects of Council policy on competition (e.g. School's Lettings policy & Regeneration led new build) *Further examination of the true costs of providing a service will take place along with visits to certain comparator authorities.*

6.1.7. Income from the centres (£198,000) although only 13% of the cost of running those centres, reflects the not for profit principles and objectives of community development work.

6.1.8. The recent government green paper on children's services has proposed the need for a Director of Children's Services and consideration of that has added to discussions around the best location for the community development service. For the Council to respond to the challenges above, community development clearly needs to have a strategic focus. A move to the corporate centre would seem logical, although it could be more closely linked to Regeneration. Wherever community centres are placed they will need ongoing support and guidance from community development if their full potential is to be realised. The consultation process including two Challenge events that threw up a number of ideas and concerns but none that suggested the level of provision should be lower than at present. The mood of the Challenge events was that

empowerment of communities themselves to run centres was welcomed, but that there were concerns around levels of resources and support, and that it was hoped this would continue to be provided in some form or other by the Council. It was not considered that there were any other agencies that could provide that support at present.

6.1.9. Conclusion

- While budget constraints lead to pressure on services, the role of Community Development is seen as key in linking local initiatives and services to the Luton Vision and to government policy. The consultation process informed us that communities and partners placed a high level of importance on the Council delivering strategically focused community development work and were in favour of local communities controlling local centres. However, they were concerned that the Council continue to provide support to centres, particularly around the transition to community management.

6.2. Consultation

6.2.1. The review team have undertaken extensive consultation with all key stakeholders. Surveys were designed to address particular stakeholder groups and their rating of aspects of the service whilst focussing on key generic questions related to the core issues of the Best Value Review – the importance of the Council's commitment to Community Development principles and services and future management arrangements for centres. The key question sets, which are common to all surveys, are reproduced at Section 11.

6.2.2. Surveys were designed to elicit appropriate information from each stakeholder group through questions on service issues and information requested to establish a profile of respondents. Community Development Area teams managed the consultation at a local level, working through community centres and their locality and using or supplying locally held databases. The Best Value Review team conducted the survey of Borough-wide partners by telephone. Questionnaires provided the following response rates:

- Centre Users - 699 questionnaires were received against our target of 1000

- Centre User Groups - 127 user groups responded from the 12 centres
- Community Partners - 36 responses from 223 postal surveys sent out
- Staff - 38 responses from 79 sent out.
- Non Users of the Service – 535 street interviews undertaken

6.2.3.   In addition, focus groups were held to engage staff in more in-depth discussions on the issues, Borough-Wide Partners included agencies external to the Council and organisations from the voluntary sector with a Borough-wide remit, as well as other Luton Borough Council services. Senior and lead officers were interviewed on the telephone for this survey. Those consulted are listed below:
Dave Crean – Marsh Farm Community Development Trust
Margaret Ward – Go East PAYP
Wes Cuell – Luton BC Children and Family Services
Andrew Elvin – Connexions
Colin Spalding – Safer Luton Partnership
Inspector Pete Buckingham – Bedfordshire Police
Anne Clube – LBC Regeneration Service
Sue Hendrick – Luton Dusnatble Partnership
Judith Ingham – LBC Policy and Performance
Val Grant – LBC Equal Opportunities
Morag Stewart – Luton Teaching PCT
Dave Sutton – LBC Leisure

6.2.4.   Finally, two challenge events were held for a mixed group of interested stakeholders including, members, representatives of voluntary & community organisations, staff, partners and survey respondents who wished to contribute further.

6.2.5.   The critical message from the consultation process was an overwhelming recognition from all groups consulted of the importance of Council support for community development across the range of activities identified in the survey. Borough-wide partners see engagement in decision making and support for community projects as a priority.

6.2.6.   Regarding centres, users and user groups were highly satisfied with the service overall with only 4% of users and 3% of user groups saying they were dissatisfied. This figure needs to be set against the response of non-users below – in other words the service is meeting current needs of its clientele but may not be reaching out to meet other

community needs. More user groups (18%) than users (7%) were involved in the centre management but in both cases more were interested in becoming more involved (14% of users and 16% of user groups).

6.2.7.   Among community partners the low response and satisfaction rating may be an indicator of the need for service improvement, with 48% of respondents satisfied but 24% dissatisfied.

6.2.8.   Employee responses showed a clear split between those who felt their work linked into local projects, partnerships and initiatives (53 %) and those whose work didn't link in (47%). There were doubts about how far centres were meeting local people's needs, about the effectiveness of communications between management and staff, and on the appropriateness of some community development objectives. This reflects the need for clarity on the strategic direction and focus of the service and its links with centre-based provision of services.

6.2.9.   Non-user responses showed that 36% used council libraries or leisure facilities, a further 25% used private leisure, school halls & childcare facilities, 15 % used community facilities outside Luton and 11% used worship-based community facilities. 32% did not know what was provided at centres while 35% were not interested or did not have time.

6.2.10. The two Community Development Trusts, which are currently running their own community centres, were also consulted. They identified under-assessment of the time necessary for capacity building and centre employee requirements and felt that self-sufficiency within the target of two years was unrealistic. They identified a need for further partnership with the Council on development work to help generate revenue streams and the challenge of providing for socially excluded groups who required subsidy whilst needing to generate income.

6.2.11. The challenge event attendees were in favour of empowerment to run their own centres supported by a central Community Development Unit. Some concern was expressed for a greater area focus and more local fieldwork with less central focus and less "strategic" work. Time constraints did not allow for in-depth exploration of the

appropriate roles of central staff in relation to support for achieving strategic objectives in the field.

6.2.12. Participants also raised concerns about how communities would react to this vision and their actual capacity to manage centres. In particular, participants stressed the need for continued support from Luton Council. There were concerns about funding and future Council budget allocation, building lease or ownership and maintenance arrangements, and the financial liabilities related to a possible need to break even. There were also concerns about the "identity" of devolved centres, the impact on and of area committees, the possibility of redundancy among centre employees before devolution, and the details of accountability and the transfer of responsibility and control through e.g. Service Level Agreements.

6.2.13. Attendees were positive about the model for empowerment and local ownership being presented, the opportunities created greater community involvement and capacity building, the possibilities of attracting additional resources, and the overall potential of improved responsive services relevant to local need. It was felt this could help with the promotion of inclusion and better community cohesion, as well as improving and better access to community resources (e.g. one-stop-shops). Finally, it was recognised that a better strategic focus for community development work, driven by local needs and through local organisations, and co-ordinated by the Council through partnership working would create a bigger impact.

6.2.14. Conclusion
- In general the consultation indicated that this was a good and valued service but with some areas needing to change to improve.
- The Vision of a central community development unit and community centres being run by Community Associations or Trusts was acceptable to stakeholders, with the reservations above needing more detailed responses. Future arrangements will need to consider the crucial balance to be struck between local control and devolution and levels of adequate and planned support provided. The co-ordination role of the central unit also needs to be worked out in detail with respect to the needs of potential Community Associations as well as in the development the overall strategic view of community development in the

Borough. The Vision must of course also be considered alongside the current high cost of the service, current budget constraints and the council's own vision, objectives and links to it's own other strategies, plans and community and regeneration initiatives.

6.3. Comparison

6.3.1. We commissioned extensive research focussing on ten other urban local authorities with multi-ethnic populations. These were selected to provide a good range of comparator information for benchmarking for the following criteria:
   - Recent Best Value Review
   - Reputation for good practice in Community Development
   - Comparable by OFSTED criteria

6.3.2. Telephone interviews were conducted with key managers in each authority. A questionnaire was devised to focus on the key themes of community development policy and strategic arrangements and management of centres. It also aimed to establish any trends that were discernible amongst the comparator set regarding the relationships between community development activities and the context of national policy developments.

6.3.3. The benchmarking sought to gain indications on the shape of community development services in terms of what was workable, appropriate to the current national context, cost effective, and desirable in terms of core community development principles.

6.3.4. Many were London Boroughs and very few had comparable community development services and delivered services by a variety of means, including one through a former Housing Action Trust. This research included attempts to find alternative service providers, but found that none exist for practical terms unless they are linked to well resourced organisations engaged in other regeneration/social benefit programmes.

6.3.5. The comparison exercise also included discussion with Community Development Foundation and Community Matters to measure Luton's approach and vision against models of community development good practice being developed nationally, in particular around strategic co-ordination, performance assessment at a corporate level

and centre management. Similarly government policy, information and research was considered to determine how Luton compared to government-led community development initiatives.

6.3.6. Key Issues

- The role of support and development work for the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) varied between support work being within or for the central Local Strategic Partnership structure or involving the wider community in Local Strategic Partnership led processes and developments. In almost all cases the community development function in other authorities is still very much engaged "out there" in the field, but often geared to realising major policy and strategic aims rather than simply "working with groups". The research confirmed a shift in community development activity away from traditional fieldwork, grants and or community centre administration to a more central role, with an emphasis on facilitating community consultation on major policies and community involvement in key strategic initiatives.

- Almost all the comparator authorities appear to be making a significant transition from the traditional pattern of community development work towards a more central and strategic role. In most cases community development strategy was embedded in either the Community Plan or the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, which provided the framework within which performance was managed. Some of the best practice appeared to be in Bradford and Southwark. In Bradford, the community development function is wholly responsible for delivering one of nine key strategies and plans that support the realisation of the Community Strategy. This strategy is called "Building Communities" and is to all intents and purposes a community development strategy for the city. In Southwark, a central community development unit is engaged in reviewing all Council activities in relation to community development, co-ordinating major Government led strategic initiatives, engaging local people in decision making as part of this work and developing performance indicators in community development for the whole Council.

- Research also showed that two authorities appear to show successful models of devolved community management of local authority owned centres through clear partnership arrangements. Two others are actively pursuing

devolution, and two further authorities have highlighted this option as part of their Best Value review processes but have not yet developed definite action plans. In three instances, authorities have had to re-acquire centres from community management. These have been for reasons of failure of the community association involved or corruption. However, in two cases the authorities appear to have prepared back-up plans and resources in place to deal with this eventuality.

6.3.7. The following conclusions for the Best Value Review can be drawn from the Comparator Benchmarking exercise:

- Community development services are increasingly aligned with the delivery of strategic priorities related to the national context.
- Equally, community development is recognised as an essential means of delivering these priorities at the Corporate level.
- The successful development of greater partnership working between local authorities and communities around transfer of community centres to greater community management is successfully practiced and the conditions for this success and its sustainability can be identified.
- Strategic alignment of community development services needs to be backed up by a role in the field to be fully effective.
- Community development fieldwork needs to be focussed on facilitating community consultation on major policies and enabling community involvement in key strategic initiatives.
- The Council's community development capacity would benefit from a location in the structure that authorises and enables a greater strategic and co-ordinating role.

6.4. Competition

6.4.1. The Community Development service considered as part of the "Compete" analysis whether Luton should provide the service or if it should be provided by another organisation or other organisations.

6.4.2. Community Matters and the Community Development Foundation provide advice and guidance and will undertake fieldwork for Local Authorities and CVS groups. They do not have an interest in actually running a community development service.

6.4.3. There are no external organisations which provide a strategic community development function for local authorities. O-regen undertake community development fieldwork in the Waltham Forest area. They are a former Housing Action Trust, which own housing and commercial property (including a pub), which gives it a sound financial base from which to run the service. There are examples of non-local authority community development work mainly in neighbourhoods or on estates.

6.4.4. It is commonplace for external organisations to run community centres either for the authority or alongside the authorities' own centres. This situation applies at Luton with the Dallow Community Centre and the planned High Town Community Centre.

6.4.5. In Luton the Luton Forum (Local Strategic Partnership) brings together the public, private, voluntary and community sectors to take an integrated approach to tackling local priorities, and could possibly be developed to take on a role in a non-council run community service.

6.4.6. It does not appear, however, that any of the community groups or non-authority members of the Luton Local Strategic Partnership have capacity or an interest at this stage in running a community development service. Investigation is necessary during the capacity building process to determine whether or not, and to what extent, local groups wish to provide community development services beyond centres and over what time period. If a Federation of Associations were to be developed, this body would have a strategic overview of community development activities in its remit and could be a potential service provider at this level, but this option could only be assessed at an appropriate time.

6.4.7. The feedback from the two Trusts which are running their own centres was that timescales for handover were at best optimistic and continued support was required to deal with issues such as capacity building, subsidies for socially excluded/low-income groups and self-sufficiency. These seem to indicate that there is currently little incentive for and likelihood of existing Trusts wishing to expand outside their own areas to run centres. A further issue in this regard is the relative obsolescence of Council centres. The policy on

School Lettings further complicates the viability of centres in meeting community needs and makes it more difficult for competitive arrangements to work.

6.4.8. Consultation has shown that in many areas community groups wish to have a greater say in the management of their local community centre. There are plenty of examples of local organisations running their own community centres or facilities that receive funding and are monitored through grant applications.

6.4.9. Conclusion
- It is generally understood that local knowledge, a commitment to anti-poverty and tackling social exclusion, the ability to generate and sustain formal and informal networks and in a not for profit context, are critical elements in community centre management. It is therefore unlikely to be an attractive proposition to organisations other than local authorities or community organisations. In any case, if it is true to the principle of community development then local people should have this opportunity, supported by appropriate agencies, at least in the first instance.
- The identified need to develop a strategic community development core indicates a requirement for stronger links to the Community Plan, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy & Local Strategic Partnership, as well as other key services supporting Community Development processes and functions e.g. Regeneration, Corporate objectives focussing on Community Involvement, Voluntary Sector Capacity Building and Community Cohesion. At the moment this would appear to be best delivered by an in-house service, as the consequence of forfeiting a strategic role in this regard would appear contrary to the direction of the Modernising Local Government agenda.
- It would, however, be good practice to consider the devolution of community centres to greater local community management. This may help to develop capacity for a possible future delivery of community development by enabling the development of local voluntary and community sector and their umbrella groups to be viable potential providers and partners.

7. Summary of Minimum Analysis Questionnaire

SERVICE NAME	Community Development
Service Functions:	Community Development Neighbourhood Renewal Managing Community Centres Area Working Playschemes 50+ Activities Community Planning Community Cohesion Community work supports Social Inclusion
Service links to corporate values and aims	Lifelong Learning for all – capacity building for communities, groups and individuals, both formally and informally; encourage and support provision of adult education. Sustainable solutions for Luton's communities – more involvement in the running of community centres, neighbourhood renewal, area based community development and consultation. Protect and support the vulnerable' promote independence – Duty of care within community centres – 50+, playschemes; pre-school; capacity building as with lifelong Learning for all. Open, accessible and responsive government – promote and provide a democratic way of working; service Area Committees and respond to local needs and demands, develop neighbourhood partnerships and links to Luton Strategic Partnership. Promote equal opportunities, tackle disadvantage – work with vulnerable and socially excluded groups both in and out of the community centres; support groups in developing and implementing equality policies and practices. Value for money – provide facilities at very competitive prices, enabling voluntary and community groups to meet, Playschemes and 50+ provisions. Attract external funding. Value our workforce – Performance appraisal; stress assessments; provide pertinent training for staff. Active in partnership, ready to work with others

	– work in partnership with many agencies, professional bodies' voluntary organisations. Establishment of Area Teams, which are currently being extended to include many other partners, development of neighbourhood partnerships.	
Views of Members, expressed at Scoping stage of report	Encouraged by the changes in the composition of community centre management committees, a move towards more community involvement in the running of centres is required. To ensure that community centres are kept open. To ensure that community groups are adequately supported whilst any changes take place. To promote Community Cohesion. To define Community Development within the context of Corporate working and to define Community Development Division's role within the Corporate setting. To consider the strategic role of Community Development and place in appropriate Service Department.	

Budget 2001/2002	£2,401,110	No. of FTE 60 Date of statistic: 31.03.02
Budget 2002/2003	£2,621,990	No. of FTE 59 Date of statistic: 31.03.03
Budget 2003/2004	£3,044,612	No. of FTE 59 Date of statistic: 31.10.03

External funding to support Community Projects has been obtained and administered.	Neighbourhood Renewal
	02/03 – SRB - £50,000
	                               ERDF- £100,180
	03/04 – SRB - £50,000
	                               ERDF - £178,700
	Ashcroft
	03/04 – SRB - £10,000
	                               ERDF - £22,000
	Ravenhill Community Project
	02/03 – SRB - £28,000

8. For Further Consideration

8.1. Staffing

8.1.1. A comprehensive Human Resource Plan needs to be developed to run for the whole transition period. Analysis of job descriptions, person specifications, salary scales and enhancements will be required. Further staff consultation is likely. A key area will be the need to recruit staff to the new Community Development Unit ahead of centres being devolved so that the Unit can facilitate this work.

8.2. Training

8.2.1. A wide range of training materials and programmes will need to be costed and developed for the new community associations management committees and centre staff.

8.3. Community Consultation

8.3.1. Extensive further local community consultation will need to be planned to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each community centre 'catchment area' with regard to involvement and capacity. Support measures and programmes will need to be developed in most cases to build or strengthen local capacity.

8.4. Costs

8.4.1. Although draft budgets proposals will have been produced further analysis will be needed to ensure levels of support are feasible.
Community Associations will need advise on preparing funding strategies.

8.5. Luton Federation of Community Associations

8.5.1. Community Matters, the national agency, could be commissioned to facilitate this development.

8.6. Premises

8.6.1. Further detailed work needs to be done by Asset Management, particularly around condition of buildings.

8.7. Service Level Agreements

    8.7.1.   Quality standards and management arrangements for Community Associations will be monitored by means of a SLA between the Council and the CA. Further now needs to be done on this.

8.8. Extended Schools

    8.8.1.   The relationship between community centres and school use needs further assessment; this should include a look at the charging policy.

8.9. Neighbourhood Renewal Work

    8.9.1.   What can be learnt from existing local work?
                Needs further analysis in relation to devolved centres and central function of Community Development.

9. Management Action Plan

    9.1.   The Management Action Plan allows for improvements to be made at this stage provided they are within the current budget and staffing structure. The review will be proposing significant budget and staffing changes in the Options and Implementation Plan. No meaningful actions have been identified that will not be covered by the Options and Improvement Plan.

10. Vision Targets

10.1. The primary aim of the Vision is twofold:

- To restructure the existing service to form a new unit which would work corporately at the centre with responsibility for community development and key strategies across the Council.
- To devolve existing council maintained community centres to new local community organizations with some staffing and financial support.

10.2. The new Community Development Unit would act as a resource for the whole Council. Its primary purpose would be to promote community development and involvement which can be achieved by co-coordinated activities aimed at:

- Promoting local governance.
- Enabling the delivery of better services.
- Promoting involvement and encouraging communities to thrive and develop.

10.3. A key part of what the new Unit will do in its first year is to develop a strategy that:

- Sets out performance standards and targets for Community Development across the Council.
- Takes forward the Best Value Review Options and Implementation Plan for devolving community centres.
- Profiles the full extent of the Councils community development activity with the view of greater co-ordination, particularly the linkages between the Community Plan, Community Cohesion, Social Exclusion, Regeneration, Luton Forum, Safer Luton Partnership and others.

10.4. Control of existing Council run community centres will be devolved to new community organisations. These new organisations will contract with the Council to provide a range of quality services and facilities in return for an agreed level of financial and staff support. Key objectives would include:

- Encouraging greater community involvement in local decision-making.
- Promoting greater community cohesion and awareness.
- Promoting equality of access to services and facilities.
- Encouraging involvement in Neighbourhood Renewal.

- Stimulating local employment and training opportunities.
- Encouraging volunteering and self-help.

10.5. Key factors from the findings in support of the Vision

10.5.1. Community development has developed in an ad hoc manner with no consistent approach to monitoring or evaluation. There are no agreed performance measurements.

10.5.2. Community development is not generally integrated into the work of other departments.

10.5.3. There is no co-ordination and integration of funding regimes between the Council and other agencies to enhance services and avoid duplication.

10.5.4. There is a strong desire from residents to widen the opportunities for involvement in local decision-making, particularly community centres.

10.5.5. Nationally, community centres are invariably managed by local community organisations.

10.5.6. There is growing recognition nationally of the valuable contribution community development makes to community well being and the achievement of key strategies.

11. Minimum Analysis Questionnaire in full.

11.1. SERVICE – Community Development

11.2. SERVICE FUNCTIONS:

11.3. Community Development

Historically community development within Luton Borough Council has been locally based within areas and delivered via the community centres. Although there have been dedicated Community Development Workers, who have not had a specific responsibility within the community centres; they have been based at the centres and have therefore often become embroiled in the day to day running of these buildings.

11.3.1. Despite this many initiatives have still been delivered within the local communities, including:-
- Work on crime and disorder partnerships through Community representation, with some encouraging results.
- Developing and supporting Neighbourhood Partnerships/ Development Groups outside of the five key renewal areas.
- Supporting projects of bio-diversity run by voluntary and community organisations (Chiltern Trust etc).

11.3.2. Many of the local community development initiatives have been developed and delivered from the community centres, by the community centre staff. Examples of this include; - The Garden Project – Saints Community Centre; Adult Education Project – Raynham Way Community Centre and the Community Café at Bury Park Community Resource Centre.

11.4. Managing Community Centres

11.4.1. There are currently twelve Council owned community centres in Luton, nine of which are fully staffed and run by Luton Borough Council staff. These include:-
- Bury Park Community Resource Centre
- Bushmead Community Centre
- Farley Community Centre
- Hockwell Ring Community Centre
- Jubilee Community Centre
- Lewsey Community Centre
- Park Town Community Centre

- Raynham Way Community Centre
- Saints Community Centre

11.4.2. The other three centres are funded by the Council and have some staff allocated to assist with the running of them, but these are very much run in partnership with the local communities. These include:-
- Chaul End Community Centre
- Limbury Community Centre
- Sundon Park Community Centre

11.4.3. All of these Community Centres come under the management of the Area Community Development Officers, who also have responsibility for the community development in each area, hence the inevitable crossing of boundaries between the two. Each of the nine full time centres is staffed by two or three Duty Officers, part time evening receptionist and have administrative support.

11.4.4. Community Centres in Luton are very different from other community buildings because they are non-partisan and independent. They have more flexibility with opening times than schools, which cannot allow adult groups access whilst children are at school, and are often not available during school holidays.

11.4.5. Community centres provide a focal point for the local community and there is a member of staff on duty to provide support, advice and sign posting. Part of the remit of a community centre is to promote social inclusion, diversity and community cohesion. The centre's also provides a place of safety and conducive environment for people to meet in – this will only ever be the case when there are staff present to provide the care required – (Duty of Care).

11.4.6. Generally they are facilitating the development of groups and individuals within an ongoing cycle, by providing a place of safety, for both to meet and grow with support and guidance – i.e. capacity building, empowerment and enablement. There is an exchange of information provided through sign posting and on going support. This includes reacting to local and national demands and initiatives.

11.4.7. Our aim is to help people to help themselves and take control of problems or issues that affect them. This can either be on a very personal, individual basis or more commonly through working with groups to build capacity to enable them to take control.

The aim is to re-dress the balance and to do this, a lot of work is around working with groups such as children; young people; adult learners; people with disabilities and people from ethnic minority backgrounds, but it is not about providing for, it is about empowerment and enabling people to become self sufficient.

11.4.8. Most of the centres have been working with their user and management committees to establish new management committees that are community led rather than being led by Members of the Council.

11.5. Neighbourhood Renewal

11.5.1. Drawing on the experience and expertise built up engaging marginalised communities in decision-making, the Community Development service played a central role in ensuring community involvement in and ownership of Luton's successful Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) bid in 2000. The Division and its partners recognised the key contribution Community Development had to make to the development of the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy through this work, and the need for dedicated neighbourhood workers who could work to maintain and develop this high level of community engagement in priority regeneration areas.

11.5.2. Funding was secured from Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), matched with the service's own in-kind resources, starting in 2002 and ending in 2006-7. The Neighbourhood Renewal Team now comprises four fieldwork staff based in Biscot/Bury Park, Dallow, High Town and Lewsey, and a manager based within the central service team. Funding has also been secured for a fifth worker in Ashcroft, but the post has not been filled to date.

11.5.3. The key task of the Neighbourhood Renewal Team is to establish and to take forward Neighbourhood Partnerships in five key renewal areas. These Partnerships have three functions:

- Ensuring community involvement in decision-making at the neighbourhood level.

- Reviewing and updating neighbourhood renewal plans.

- Taking forward key priorities in each neighbourhood based on local concerns.

11.5.4. They are all showing good signs of progress and have established important foundations to build on for the next 3 years.

11.5.5. The establishment of the Team has been a development for the service in terms of locating Community Development within wider strategic frameworks (Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, Community Plan and the Local Strategic Partnership). The Team leader has also been instrumental in the establishment of the Luton Assembly (the community and voluntary sector forum for the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). This has enabled some of the approaches and funding opportunities available to key renewal areas to begin to be introduced in new neighbourhoods and as part of mainstream Community Development Services.

11.6. Area Working

11.6.1. The Area Community Development Officers have established Area Teams in all six geographical areas of the town and have facilitated an area planning process through integrated working across the different sections of the division, resulting in the production of a first set of Area Plans. These Area plans outline the key themes and priorities for Community Development, Adult Education and Youth work, and have been through an active consultation process with local residents, including young people, partner agencies, employees and Members.

11.6.2. The Area Plans outline what is to be done, involvement of key agencies and partners, the purpose and objectives of strengthening the capacity of voluntary and community sector and a time scale. A report is available which outlines the cross cutting themes from all the area plans.

11.6.3. The Area Teams were initially made up only of officers from Community Education and Development, but they are now going through a process of expanding these to include representatives from various local agencies and organisations. The Area teams link in with the Area Committees, where they report their progress and gain support for local initiatives.

11.7. Playschemes

11.7.1. Playschemes are provided at all of Luton Borough Council's twelve community centres, during school holidays. This provision concentrates on supplying a safe and secure environment for 5 – 12 year olds. All staff undergo a rigorous selection process to ensure their suitability and they must have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) clearance before they are able to commence work.

11.7.2. A varied programme is provided at each site, including various forms of play, art & craft, exercise; cooking; social education; citizenship and outings. All trips and activities are risk assessed and supervised by experienced and trained staff.

11.7.3. The playschemes are heavily subsidised by the Council, which results in a good quality, fun, holiday provision at low cost to the user.

11.8. 50+ Activities

11.8.1. Although most of the 50+ activities take place in the Community Centres and are supported by the community centre staff, these have up until this year been co-ordinated on a town wide basis by staff from Leisure Services, which has also meant that all the revenue has also gone to Leisure. It was agreed earlier this year, when the 50+ co-ordinator post was identified as a saving, that Community Development would take this responsibility over.

11.8.2. We are still going through a transition stage at the moment, which is causing many problems as the users have been used to having a dedicated officer and have not yet accepted that we cannot provide everything that Leisure did. We have been working with the 50+ supporters group to try and persuade them that they should be taking more responsibility for their own future, but at the moment this is an up hill struggle as leisure always did it for us! This is however a very able group of people, who have all the skills necessary to move forward, but as yet, not the will!

11.8.3. The various, weekly activities are now all being facilitated at the individual centres and we are in the process of putting together a town wide programme to be released in January. The town wide activities are very much being provided by Community Development staff at the moment, but it is envisaged that this will gradually move over to the Users as we build their capacity and will. If this does not happen we will need to consider whether or not they continue.

11.8.4. The 50+ activities within the centres provide more than just a room to meet, they provide:-
- Safe and secure environment – people aged over 50.
- For a realistic age range of between 65 – 95 years old.
- Social inclusion for older people.
- A place and purpose to meet new people and therefore combats loneliness, especially for those recently bereaved.
- Advice and sign posting.
- Encouragement for independence in a supportive environment.
- Capacity Building via involvement with User/Management Committees and volunteering at events.
- Opportunities to learn new skills – formal adult education (Internet access, flower arranging, Introduction to computing etc.) and via play i.e. 50+ Bowls, art classes etc.
- Health benefits i.e. through physical activities.

11.9. Community Planning

11.9.1. This is evidenced throughout this report, but is mainly working with partners to ensure a cohesive approach to area needs through joint project working.

11.10. Community Cohesion

11.10.1. There is a huge drive from Government to promote cross cutting community working to reduce racial tension and conflict.

11.10.2. It is the role of community workers to make a public commitment to building good community relations and tackle problems where they exist. We invite leaders of all communities and faiths for their ideas and support, and we make it clear that diversity is valued and supported. A modern multi racial society must be based on mutual respect and understanding and tolerance is our aim.

11.10.3. Community Workers challenge discriminatory attitudes by confronting hate and derision and conflict mediation. A lot of this is achieved by:-

11.10.4. Community based facilitation mainly involving sports, cultural activities and festivals.

11.10.5. Assisting and supporting communities in bringing together strategies to achieve social, economic and environmental goals.

11.11. Promote and Facilitate Social Inclusion

11.11.1. Community development workers:-
- Play a full role in community cohesion as demonstrated above.
- Assist and support communities in bringing together strategies to achieve social, economic and environmental goals.
- Promote equal opportunities.
- Tackle disadvantage by working with socially excluded groups and individuals to build capacity, both in and out of the community centres.
- Support groups in developing and implementing equality policies and practices.

11.12. Service Links To Corporate Values and Aims - Much of this has already been detailed in the 'Service Functions' section of this report, so where possible a reference will be used rather than repetition.

11.13. Lifelong Learning for all

    11.13.1. Community Development is actively engaged in capacity building for communities, groups and individuals, both formally and informally; and encourages and supports the provision of adult education.

    11.13.2. Community Centres have always encouraged adult education classes to take place in community centres, but in the last year there has been a new commitment to identify local needs and wants and facilitate training in partnership with Luton Borough Council's Adult Education Services.

    11.13.3. It is working in partnership with Adult Education to look at providing ASDAN training for volunteers within local communities.

    11.13.4. The service functions section referring to Community Development; Neighbourhood Renewal and Managing Community Centres have further examples of this.

11.14. Sustainable solutions for Luton's communities

    11.14.1. The Management Committees for community centres have been re-launched to include more involvement from the local community and the control has been passed from elected Councillors to the community members.

    11.14.2. Neighbourhood renewal initiatives and area based community development assists and supports communities in bringing together strategies to achieve social, economic and environmental goals. These include Neighbourhood Action Groups, neighbourhood based development groups, Neighbourhood Action Partnerships and Crime based action groups.

    11.14.3. Play a lead role in community cohesion and associated initiatives as illustrated in the service function section of this report.

    11.14.4. Assist other departments to gain access to hard to reach communities for various consultation exercises, to ensure that appropriate solutions are reached.

11.15. Protect and support the vulnerable' promote independence

    11.15.1. The 'duty of care' afforded to all individuals and groups accessing the services within Luton Borough Council is taken extremely seriously by community development staff, especially as much of the work carried out, specifically targets the vulnerable and socially excluded members of our communities.

    11.15.2. The capacity building work that continues on a daily basis is all about promoting independence, but within a secure environment.

    11.15.3. All staff, volunteers and group leaders that work within, or hire our premises are required to provide proof of qualification; insurance details and Criminal Records Bureau clearance if working with a vulnerable group. It is essential that the public's trust in the Council is not misplaced - if an activity is running in a 'Council run' building, parents especially expect their children to be safe and cared for.

11.16. Open, accessible and responsive government

    11.16.1. Within community development it is essential to promote and provide a democratic way of working, which teaches and encourages members of the public how to access both the staff and the Members of Luton Borough Council. This is all part of the every day work that takes place when building the capacity of groups and individuals. The Area Community Development officers also attend all the Community Ward Forums and the Area Committees, making them easily accessible to members of the community. Update reports are also provided for each of the relevant Area Committees and support is given to local groups, who wish to try and access funding via the Area Committees.

    11.16.2. A large part of the work carried out by community development is about responding to local needs and demands. Many methods are employed to do this including local action groups and partnerships, which have been discussed in the community development and managing community centres service functions.

11.17. Promote equal opportunities, tackle disadvantage

11.17.1. One of the key priorities for community development has always been to work with vulnerable and socially excluded groups both in and out of the community centres and to support groups in developing and implementing equality policies and practices. This is clearly demonstrated within the community cohesion and promote and facilitate social inclusion service functions of this report.

11.18. Value for money

11.18.1. The community centres provide facilities at very low prices, for community and voluntary groups to hire. They also provide a good quality, safe environment for family and community social occasions at very competitive prices. As already discussed the playschemes are very good value for money as it is heavily subsidised by the Council. The 50+ provision is also excellent and you can obtain two hours of physical, mental or emotional stimulation for £1.25, in the form of activities such as short mat bowls, line dancing, tea dances, adult education classes etc.

11.18.2. A good value for money service is therefore provided to the Users of the community centres. To decide whether or not this is a good value service for money, as far as the Council and residents are concerned will be decided by the outcome of this Best Value Review.

11.19. Value our workforce

11.19.1. Community Development has made great strides in this area in the last two years. A lot of this has been achieved by promoting and ensuring better communication. This is done via a staff newsletter - Community Matters - regular team meetings and the working together of the Area Teams. There has also been far more commitment to performance appraisals, stress assessments, probation processes, sickness reviews and proper induction. A further development is that more pertinent training is being provided for staff, which encourages both personal and professional development.

11.20. Active in partnership, ready to work with others

      11.20.1. Community development work in partnership with many agencies, professional bodies', statutory and voluntary organisations. This is clearly demonstrated in the community development; managing community centres, neighbourhood renewal and area working service functions within this report.

11.21. BUDGETS

Total - 2001/2002   £2,401,110   No. of FTE 60 - 31.03.2002

Total – 2002.2003   £2,621,990   No. of FTE 59 - 31.03.2003

Total - 2003/2004   £3,044,612   No. of FTE 59 - 31.10.2003

12. Consultation Methods and Results

12.1. Introduction

12.1.1. As part of the Community Development Best Value Review, we have undertaken an extensive piece of consultation with all key stakeholders. Surveys were designed to address particular stakeholder groups and their rating of aspects of the service whilst focussing on key generic questions related to the core issues of the Best Value Review – the importance of the Council's commitment to Community Development principles and services and future management arrangements for centres. The key question sets which are common to all surveys are reproduced here:

How important or unimportant do you think it is for the Council to support the following community work?
Undertake projects with voluntary and community organisations to improve the local quality of life
Enable greater community involvement in decision making on local and town-wide issues
Help community groups access funding and other resources
Make representations on behalf of local communities
Organising community events
Ensuring local organisations listen to and work with local communities more effectively
Develop the skills of community groups to deliver projects and services
Increase opportunities for volunteers to gain skills and qualifications
Encourage local businesses to support the community

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
Community centres should provide room hire only, with no Council organised activities
Community centres should be run by people elected from amongst the users and user groups, supported by the Council
Community centres should be linked to the facilities and community activities of local schools
Community centres should be run by the Council
There should be fewer, better quality, community centres
The number of community centres should remain the same
There should be more community centres

12.2. Methodology

12.2.1. The consultation was designed and tested working with the Luton Borough Council Consultation Manager and a small representative team taken from the Best Value Review Team. Surveys were designed to elicit appropriate information from each stakeholder group through questions on service issues and information requested to establish a profile of respondents.

12.2.2. Surveys were checked with the Review Team and Reference Group. Community Development Area teams managed the consultation at a local level, working through community centres and their locality and using or supplying locally held databases. The Best Value Review team conducted the survey of Borough-wide partners by telephone.

12.2.3. In addition, focus groups were held to engage staff in more in-depth discussions on the issues. Finally, two challenge events are planned for those stakeholders who, after completing a survey, wish to contribute further to the Review by discussing in more depth the proposed vision.

12.2.4. The consultation process was designed to furnish as much centre and locality based information as possible. For the purposes of the Best Value Review, overall figures for results have been used but the Community Development management team will be using this micro-level information and analysing any significant variances to help with service planning in the future.

12.3. Stakeholders

12.3.1. The following stakeholder groups were consulted:
- Centre Users
- Centre User Groups
- Community Partners
- Staff
- Borough-wide Partners
- Non Users of the Service
- Community Development Trusts

12.3.2. The methodology and key results from each piece of consultation are set out below. Responses on the core issues are at the end of the summary.

12.4. Centre Users

12.4.1. Centre Users are considered to be individual users of centres. They were consulted through surveys with pre-paid reply envelopes. Surveys were distributed through community centres where the consultation process was advertised and staff were requested to encourage centre users to complete the forms. Respondents were invited to take part in further consultation (Challenge Events) by returning their names and addresses.

12.4.2. Summary of feedback:

- We received 699 returns against our target of 1000. This is a representative sample with 33% BME origin, and 11% with Disability. 30% of these users are under 35, and 41% over 55. 76% are female and 24% male.
- 93% of respondents use centres once a week or more.
- 13% of responses recorded indicate usage is connected with indicators of "civic engagement" (participation in management committee/local issues/local projects).
- Centres received a generally high (very good – fairly good) rating across all aspects of their service, but with slightly lower ratings on charges, opportunities for community development, involvement of local people in centre management, state of repair, and staff support for community development.
- 87% of respondents declared themselves very satisfied (52%) or fairly satisfied (35%) with the service overall. Only 4% said they were dissatisfied.
- 7% of respondents are involved in the centre management, and a further 14% were interested to become involved.
- The importance of Council support across the range of community development activities identified was rated consistently high (very important or fairly important).
- There was an overall preference expressed for centres being run by the Council, but support also shown for linking provision to local schools, and having greater community involvement in management of centres. Respondents wanted more community centres, and the option of no Council involvement was firmly rejected.

12.5. Centre User Groups

12.5.1. Centre User Groups were considered to be groups using and registered with the centres as a result of this usage. They were sent postal surveys with pre-paid reply envelopes requesting one of their representatives to reply. User groups were identified from the databases held at each of twelve centres. Respondents were invited to take part in further consultation (Challenge Events) by returning their names and addresses.

12.5.2. Summary of feedback:

- 127 user groups responded from the twelve centres. 94% of respondents use the centres once or more per week.
- 25% of respondents use no other community facilities.
- 18% of responses indicate usage is connected with indicators of "civic engagement" (participation in management committee/local issues/local projects).
- Centres received a generally high (very good – fairly good) rating across all aspects of their service, but with slightly lower ratings on state of repair, charges, involvement of local people in centre management.
- 91% of respondents declared themselves very satisfied (52%) or fairly satisfied (39%) with the service overall. Only 3% said they were dissatisfied.
- 18% of respondents are involved in the centre management, and a further 16% were interested to become involved.
- The importance of Council support across the range of community development activities identified was rated consistently high (very important or fairly important).
- There was an overall preference expressed for centres being run by the Council, but support also shown for linking provision to local schools, and having greater community involvement in management of centres. Respondents wanted more community centres, and the option of no Council involvement was firmly rejected.

12.6. Community Partners

12.6.1. Community Partners were considered to be community based organisations and their representatives from within community centre localities or working with Community Development area teams at area level. Lists were drawn up by Community Development area teams and collated with centrally held databases to avoid duplication. 223 postal surveys were sent out with pre-paid reply envelopes and a written request for a representative or named individual to reply. Respondents were invited to take part in further consultation (Challenge Events) by returning their names and addresses.

12.6.2. Summary of feedback:

- 36 community partners responded. Respondents work with officers across the different service functions. 58% use community centres.
- 28% of responses show usage of community facilities that are not Council owned or managed (premises/facilities owned by community/voluntary group or located at a place of worship). 14% of responses show usage of school halls.
- The Community Development service received a medium rating (fairly good – neither good nor bad) rating across all aspects of the service. Helpfulness and knowledge and expertise of staff rated slightly higher than communication and ease of contact.
- 48% of respondents declared themselves very satisfied (12%) or fairly satisfied (36%) with the service overall. 24% said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 24% said they were dissatisfied.
- The importance of Council support across the range of community development activities identified was rated consistently high (very important or fairly important).
- There was a strong overall preference expressed for centres being run by members of the community using the centres. These people to be elected and the Council to continue to support the development of the centres. Support was also shown for linking provision to local schools. There was a clear expression of opinion against centres being run by the Council. Respondents wanted more community centres (though a strong minority opinion was registered for fewer, better quality centres), and the

option of no Council involvement was firmly rejected.

12.7. Staff

12.7.1. Following a special bulletin which explained the key issues of the Best Value Review and what was taking place to address them, all staff within the Community Development service were sent a survey (including part-time and casual staff) as part of the consultation process. The survey was checked and agreed with UNISON before sending with pre-paid return envelopes. The survey invited respondents to take part in independently facilitated Focus Groups to explore the issues raised in more depth.

12.7.2. Summary of feedback:

- We received 38 responses from staff out of a total of 79. There were responses from all main centres and staff groups.
- Centres received a generally high (very good – fairly good) rating across all aspects of their service, but with lower ratings on state of repair and involvement of local people in centre management.
- 53 % of respondents said their work linked into local projects, partnerships and initiatives. 47% said that their work didn't link in.
- Most respondents somewhat agreed or neither agreed nor disagreed that the Community Development Division was functioning well in terms of communications and aims and objectives for the service in the corporate context. There was less agreement on how far centres were meeting local people's needs, and slightly less agreement on the effectiveness of communications between the Divisional Management Team and staff, and on the appropriateness of community development objectives set by management.
- The importance of Council support across the range of community development activities identified was rated consistently high (very important or fairly important).
- There was a strong overall preference expressed for centres being run by the Council, and support also shown for linking provision to local schools. There was a clear expression of opinion against centres being run by members of the community using centres who are elected and supported by the Council Respondents wanted more community centres, and the option of no Council involvement was firmly rejected.

12.8. Borough-Wide Partners

12.8.1. Borough-Wide Partners were identified by the Community Development service Divisional Management Team and Review Group. They include agencies external to the Council and organisations from the voluntary sector with a Borough-wide remit, as well as other Luton Borough Council services. Senior and lead officers were interviewed on the telephone for this survey.

12.8.2. Summary of feedback:

- 34% of respondents work closely with Divisional Management Team, 28% with Neighbourhood Renewal Workers, 17% with Area Community Development Officers, 14% with Area Community Development Workers, and 7% with Duty Officers.
- The Community Development service received an average to good (neither good nor bad – fairly good) rating across six aspects of the service. Levels of co-operation and ease of contacting the right person rated slightly higher than communications and knowledge and expertise. The overall relationship with partner organisations was described as fairly good.
- 62% of respondents were satisfied with the service. 23% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 8% said they were dissatisfied.
- The importance of Council support across the range of community development activities identified was rated mostly high (very important or fairly important). Undertaking projects with voluntary and community organisations to improve the local quality of life, and enabling greater community involvement in decision making on local and town-wide issues, were rated particularly highly.
- There was an overall preference expressed for centres being run by people elected from amongst the users and user groups, supported by the Council. Strong support was also shown for linking provision to local schools. Respondents wanted more community centres, and the option of no Council involvement was firmly rejected.

12.9. Non- Users

12.9.1. Non-users were defined as people who had not used the Council's community centres in the last twelve months. Surveys were conducted face to face with potential respondents by Community Development staff in each of the nineteen wards of the Borough. A further one thousand (1000) people will be surveyed through the forthcoming Citizen Panel survey (results due mid- December).

12.9.2. Summary of feedback:

- 535 non-users responded to the survey. 51% were women. 43% were under 35, 16% over 55. 10% were disabled, and 49% BME.
- 15% used community facilities outside Luton. 36% used other Council services (libraries 22%, public leisure facilities 14%). 11% used community facilities at places of worship. 9% used private leisure facilities. 9% used school halls. 7% used childcare facilities (crèche/play group/nursery).
- 32% of those surveyed said they didn't use centres because they did not know what was being provided at centres. 35% were either not interested (14%) or didn't have time (21%). 15% said the activities they were interested in were not provided.
- The importance of Council support across the range of community development activities identified was rated consistently high (very important or fairly important).
- There was an overall preference expressed for centres being run by the Council and linking provision to local schools, and support also shown for having greater community involvement in management of centres. Respondents wanted more community centres, (though a strong minority opinion was registered for fewer, better quality centres), and the option of no Council involvement was firmly rejected.

12.10. Community Development Trusts

12.10.1. Community Development Trusts were identified and surveyed in their own right (apart from being invited to respond as community partners) as representing potential local models of community management of centres in partnership with the Council. A qualitative telephone interview was conducted with representatives of the Dallow and Lewsey Trusts who are already managing buildings.

12.10.2. Summary of feedback:

- The Community Development Trusts model was proposed by Luton Borough Council as the most appropriate to allow for full community ownership and responsibility for the new centres. Some concern was raised about poor communications between the Trusts and the Council during the early stages of the projects' development that led to later problems.
- The assessment of the time required for the successful capacity building and recruitment of Trustees has been insufficient so far. Similarly it was stated that the personnel requirements for running the centres have in one instance been underestimated. Overall it was felt that the target of sustainability after two years from opening was very difficult to achieve and may not be realistic.
- Development work support is needed to help generate revenue streams to achieve sustainability (Neighbourhood Renewal Workers and Area Community Development Workers are providing some of this).
- There is a big dilemma and potential contradiction where centres seek to meet the accommodation needs of more socially excluded groups who are least able to pay, since the need to generate income through charges is also paramount.
- The development of policies and procedures a big burden and could be made easier with better support. Likewise, access to strategic information on town-wide and local provision could help to co-ordinate the work of the Trusts beyond purely local considerations.
- One Trust made the point that it performing tasks that Luton Borough Council would need to address if they were not there (e.g. meeting corporate Social Inclusion targets) and this needs to reflect in partnership agreements for the future.

12.11. Conclusions

12.11.1. The key conclusions from the Community Development Best Value Review consultation process are set out below:

12.12. The Council and Community Development

12.12.1. The number one message from the consultation process was an overwhelming recognition from all groups consulted of the importance of Council support for Community Development across the range of activities identified. Borough-Wide Partners see engagement in decision-making and support for community projects as priorities.

12.13. Community Centre Management

12.13.1. There was a broad consensus of opinion supporting centres being run in partnership with local people, and for linking provision to local schools. Opinions diverged on the issue of the Council running centres, with Borough-Wide partners and Community Partners showing strong support for having greater community involvement in management of centres. Community Partners felt that the Council should not run them, whereas Staff felt that centres should not be run by members of the public elected from amongst the users and user groups. The option of no Council involvement whatsoever was firmly rejected.

12.13.2. The feedback from Luton's Community Development Trusts is particularly relevant in terms of future management arrangements for centres, pointing to some important emerging lessons on capacity building timescales, realistic objectives and financial sustainability, income generation, co-ordination with other services, programmes and projects, partnership working with the Council, and co-operation with other centres.

12.14. Community Centre Development:

12.14.1. Respondents generally wanted more community centres (though a minority opinion was registered for fewer, better quality centres). Approximately one third of Non-Users stated that they didn't use them because they did not know what was going on in them. Both Users and User Groups observed that the state of repair of buildings was not satisfactory. These same groups also felt that there could

be more opportunities for involvement in centre management. Further issues for centre development around the balance between current users and new users are raised below in the next section.

12.15. Service Satisfaction

12.15.1. Very high rates of service satisfaction were recorded amongst Users (87%) and User Groups (91%). This correlates with the figures for using the centre once a week or more (93% & 94% respectively) which suggests that the centres are meeting the needs of current users and user groups very well, but needs to be set against the Non-User feedback on barriers to usage. It also needs to be set against Staff feedback which indicates some uncertainty over the extent to which community needs are being met by centres.

12.15.2. Amongst Community Partners, service satisfaction was 48% (compared with Luton's Best Value Performance Indicators of 56%) that may reflect some of the operational difficulties Community Development has had over the last few years. Borough-Wide Partners recorded a 62% satisfaction rate, which may reflect the increasing recognition of community development's contributions at strategic levels.

12.16. Staff and Management

12.16.1. Most respondents somewhat agreed or neither agreed nor disagreed that the Community Development Division was functioning well in terms of communications and aims and objectives for the service in the corporate context. There was less agreement on how far centres were meeting local people's needs, and slightly less agreement on the effectiveness of communications between the Divisional Management Team and staff, and on the appropriateness of community development objectives set by management.

12.16.2. 47% of staff replying felt their work didn't link in with local projects, partnerships and initiatives. Although there were more respondents from the Administration section of the Division than from other job areas, this feedback may still indicate lower levels of understanding of community development principles amongst staff. Some external feedback that may reflect this aspect of Divisional culture are the lower ratings recorded by Users and User Groups

on involvement in centre management and opportunities for community development.

12.16.3. From Borough-Wide Partners the Community Development service received an average to good (neither good nor bad – fairly good) rating across six aspects of the service. Levels of co-operation and ease of contacting the right person rated slightly higher than communications and knowledge and expertise. The overall relationship with partner organisations was described as fairly good.

13. Benchmarking Methods and Results

13.1. Introduction

13.1.1. For the purposes of the Community Development Best Value Review we have commissioned extensive research focussing on ten other urban local authorities with multi-ethnic populations (see Report for details). These were selected to provide a good range of comparator information for benchmarking as follows:

- Recent Best Value Review
- Reputation for good practice in Community Development
- Comparable by OFSTED criteria

13.1.2. Telephone interviews were conducted with key managers in each authority. A questionnaire was devised to focus on the key themes of the review – Community development policy and strategic arrangements and management of centres. It also aimed to establish what trends were discernible amongst the comparator set in regarding the relationships between Community Development activities and the context of national policy developments.

13.1.3. Overall, we were seeking to gain indications on the shape of Community Development services in terms of what was workable, appropriate to the current national context, cost effective, and desirable in terms of core Community Development principles.

13.2. Main Components and Strategic Direction of Community Development Services

13.2.1. Five key components of Community Development Services were identified:

- Policy
- Fieldwork
- Community Premises
- Community Participation/Consultation
- Grants Administration

13.2.2. In line with developments in national policy (e.g. Modernising Local Government, Community Planning, Active Communities, Community Cohesion, and Neighbourhood Renewal), the research confirmed a shift in Community Development activity.

13.2.3. This is away from traditional fieldwork, grants and/or community centre administration to a more central role, with an emphasis on facilitating community consultation on major policies and community involvement in key strategic initiatives.

13.2.4. Comparator Authorities display a range of responses to the challenge, but almost all of them appear to be making a significant transition from the traditional pattern of community development work towards a more central and strategic role.

13.3. Location of Community Development Services

13.3.1. Community Development services in the comparator set that are working effectively in realising strategic objectives are mostly located at the corporate centre or in specialist service areas focussed on providing a front-line interface with local people.

13.3.2. Location is less a factor in determining the effectiveness and ability of the service to contribute to corporate priorities than having clear and authoritative relationships and partnership arrangements with a network of other key corporate functions and processes. These are chiefly:

- Community Plan, Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy & Local Strategic Partnership
- Other key services supporting Community Developing processes and functions – e.g. Regeneration, Housing
- Corporate objectives focussing on Community Involvement, Voluntary Sector Capacity Building and Community Cohesion

13.4. Role in Local Strategic Partnerships

13.4.1. Of the ten comparator authorities, eight play a major role in the development of the Local Strategic Partnerships and/or its related key functions (Community Plan/Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy).

13.4.2. Roles vary from support work within or for the central Local Strategic Partnerships structure to involving the wider community in Local Strategic Partnerships led processes and developments. The Community Development function is still very much based "out there" in the field, but is geared to realising major policy and strategic aims rather than simply "working with groups".

13.5. Community Development Strategies

13.5.1. None of the comparator authorities have distinct Community Development strategies. However, six point to their strategic objectives being embedded in the Community Plan and Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

13.5.2. One authority's Community Development service has responsibility for the delivery of a distinct strategy that makes up one of nine strategies and plans that underpin the realisation of the overall Community Plan. This is called "Building Communities" and provides a useful benchmark for the development of Luton's Community Development vision.

13.6. Budgets and Expenditure

13.6.1. The data gathered on this is not conclusive enough for straightforward comparison since information would need to be checked in detail against local budgetary practices and service specifications in order to ensure fully meaningful specific comparisons.

13.6.2. However, the research does provide a broad-brush indication of levels and allocation of spend. It splits the analysis between three key functions - Core Community Development, Community Centres, and Grants to the Voluntary & Community Sector. Some key points emerge from this analysis:

- On available broad brush figures from six authorities the cost of Community Development services across the three functions per capita range from £38.3 to £8.7 (£20.7 average).
- There is no apparent correlation between population and levels of expenditure.
- The balance between expenditure on core Community Development and Community Centres appears to shift

toward core Community Development expenditure where there is increased community involvement in and ownership of Community Centre management. (However, no data is available in this study on the extent to which this shift is compensated through grants).

- Few authorities have attempted to calculate the value of corporate Community Development investment beyond Community Development budgets, but in at least one case this is significant.

- Some authorities monitor levels of external funding levered in by core Community Development budgets, and this ranges from 2.25:1 to 0.7:1.

13.7. Staffing Levels

13.7.1. Most Core Community Staffing levels fall between ten and twenty members, with two having more than twenty, and two less than ten.

13.7.2. There is some evidence that in the instances where authorities focus on strategic co-ordination of Community Development, staffing levels have reduced to the level where there are concerns about their real effectiveness.

13.7.3. Staff Development is an issue for all authorities and a range of approaches are highlighted which can contribute to the development of Community Development staff in Luton.

13.8. Community Centres

13.8.1. Two authorities appear to show successful models of devolved community management of local authority owned centres through clear partnership arrangements. Two others are actively pursuing devolution, and two further authorities have highlighted this option as part of their Best Value review processes but have not yet developed definite action plans.

13.8.2. In three instances, authorities have had to re-acquire centres from community management. These have been for reasons of failure of the community association involved or corruption. However, in two cases the authorities appear to have prepared back-up plans and resources in place to deal with this eventuality.

13.9. Performance Management

13.9.1. With no nationally accepted standards and measures for Community Development activity, performance management frameworks are difficult to compare. However, several authorities are involved with the Audit Commission and the Community Development Foundation in piloting key performance Indicators, some of which will inform the Quality of Life indicators recommended to local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships. These are clearly of interest for future performance management frameworks on Luton.

13.9.2. Service Planning is by and large in use, and one authority has all its targets and performance indicators reflected in the Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

13.10. Cost Effectiveness & Best Value

13.10.1. Some authorities are examining ways of showing the relative value of Community Development services through the following measures:

- Managing Community involvement processes to enable the delivery of key corporate and Local Strategic Partnerships strategic objectives.
- Benefits to the community, community and voluntary groups, local authority and its partners derived from provision of Community Centres.
- Financial leverage from external sources.

13.10.2. One authority is pursuing a number of avenues for devolution and partnership for the future of its centres, with financial savings to the Council as the driver.

13.10.3. Four authorities have had external Best Value inspections from the Audit Commission. Three were deemed "Good" with similar prospects for improvement and one "Fair" with promising prospects for improvement. This confirms that Community Development services that are configured on the lines described above appear to be matching up to the external expectations of the inspectorate.

13.11. Summary Evaluation & Benchmarking Analysis

13.11.1. Table 5 (page 74) offers an assessment of the ten-comparator authorities with Luton Community Development Service across the following criteria:

- Strategy (Is there a Policy or Vision? Does this translate into a Strategy? Is the Strategy embedded in the Council/Local Strategic Partnerships?).
- Fieldwork in the traditional sense. To what degree (High, medium or low, not at all) does it still play a part in the work of the Community Development function?
- Grants Administration. To what degree (High, medium, low, not at all) does this play a part in the function's work?
- Community premises. To what degree are they managed hands on by the service (Very much, some devolution, a lot of devolution, not at all)?
- Consultation/involvement. How involved is the function in these processes. A high level might indicate major responsibility for supporting a significant community network or participative infrastructure.
- Location. We have scored a central location higher than being within a big department, but this is to some extent dependent on local traditions.
- Budget. Over £1m (by a clear margin) scores high, £750k-£1m scores medium, under £750k scores low.
- Staff. Over twenty scores high, ten-twenty scores medium, under ten scores low.

13.12. Scores in the Table are indicated by ticks. High/very is indicated by three ticks; medium/average by two ticks; low/not much by one tick, not at all by no tick.

13.12.1. See Table 5 (page 74).

13.13. Conclusions

13.13.1. The following conclusions for the Best Value can be drawn from the Benchmarking exercise:

- Community development services need increasingly to be aligned with the delivery of strategic priorities related to the national context.
- Equally, Community Development needs to be recognised as an essential means of delivering these priorities at the Corporate level.

- The successful development of greater partnership working between local authorities and communities around transfer of community centres to greater Community Management is successfully practiced and the conditions for this success and its sustainability can be identified.
- Strategic alignment of Community Development services needs to be backed up by a role in the field to be fully effective.
- Community Development fieldwork needs to be focussed on facilitating community consultation on major policies and enabling community involvement in key strategic initiatives.
- The Council's Community Development capacity would benefit from a location in the structure that authorises and enables a greater strategic fit and co-ordinating role.

14. Remarks from Critical Friends

14.1. Comments by Gabriel Chanan, Community Development Foundation

"The Luton Community Development Best Value review does a very thorough job of analysing the present situation and the options for change. It is also a very useful addition to the growing literature on community development in particular local situations. In addition to its own immediate purposes, it will be of interest to other local authorities, and particularly to those with a significant commitment to community centres.

I am persuaded by the review as a whole that the recommended course of action is the right one, namely to establish Community Development as a new central unit and to gradually devolve the management of community centres to community organisations. However, as well as showing a number of options about how this could be done, the review usefully alerts the Council to a number of dilemmas that are likely to be encountered, and possible pitfalls that can be minimised by carefully preparation, such as having a 'fail-safe' plan for taking back the management of a devolved community centre in the event of serious failure.

The results of the consultation exercise are illuminating in a number of different ways. It is notable that with the exception of the partner organisations, both individual users, user groups and staff respondents expressed an overall preference for centres being run by the council. Taken together with the generally high rating for the value of the service provided by the centres (again, excepting community partners) this is likely to mean that plans to devolve the centres to community management are likely to cause some anxiety. There may be some natural resistance to change, but this should not be taken merely as inertia but as a genuine high valuation of the present situation. This alone should not prevent change but it is important that in the course of change anxieties are allayed and present levels of satisfaction are at least maintained.

At the same time, it is notable that there is a considerable margin of individuals and user groups not yet involved in the management of centres who would be interested in becoming involved. Not all of these may materialise when it comes to action, but if even half of them do, this suggests there are some reserves of energy in the community to take on the task. Additionally, some of those community members and organisations already involved in management may be willing to take on greater responsibility.

There is also clearly scope for at least some of the centres to increase their appeal to some of the non-users. There will always be a number of people who are non-users for reasons such as 'not enough time' etc (which can mean simply not interested) but it should be possible by better publicity and networking to draw in a number of the people who say they are non-users because they do not know what is going on in the centres.

What is vital about the change process is that it should be gradual, well-monitored, supported by training and guidance, should draw in people beyond 'the usual suspects' and that practical matters should be accompanied by values and debate about how to serve the whole community. The worst outcome would be if large sections of the community come to feel that a community centre has been 'captured' by a self-serving clique.

I think one of the main challenges of the change will be how the council can generate a creative, productive and inclusive ethos for the centres at the same time as devolving the management.

Referring again to the consultation, the fact that the 'partners' are the only group of respondents who specifically do not want the council to run the centres, and that their views are different from users and staff, places a question mark over the possible role of some of these partners in future management of any of the centres. Some might bid to become heavily involved but if so it must be considered how far they could command credibility and confidence from users and staff, or what they would need to do to build it.

I welcome the review's acknowledgement of current efforts by Community Development Foundation and partners to establish national standards for Community Development, and acknowledge in return that Community Development Foundation's involvement in Luton's Best Value review is also a source of learning for ourselves. We welcome the review's intention to consider making use of the national indicators that we are helping to develop.

The work on standards of Community Development has continued to develop whilst this review has been taking place. Broadly the position is that four main indicators are recommended for national usage to measure:

> Social capital
> Community cohesion
> Community involvement in governance

The condition of the local community and voluntary sector, including level of volunteering

However, these indicators only reflect the current state of these features, not how far they have been produced by Community Development or capacity building.

It is therefore acknowledged that local needs will vary and that a variety of different additional measures may be wanted. National standards of Community Development are therefore likely to emerge from a period, perhaps three years or so, in which a variety of Local Authorities and their partners make wide use of the core outcome measures plus customised local measures such that a profile of national experience will gradually emerge and standards of minimum, adequate and high Community Development achievement can be deduced. During this 'acclimatization' period Community Development Foundation would recommend Local Authorities to adopt the four core outcome indicators.

I would suggest therefore that some of the results of the consultation exercise should be used as a baseline, and these items developed as targets and indicators to accompany the change process, and resources earmarked to repeat the consultation annually over the next three years. Issues of interest to monitor whether change is proceeding successfully might include:

- Continued usage by those who were already using – individuals
- New users attracted – individuals
- Continued usage by groups and organisations
- New usage by groups and organisations
- Levels of satisfaction with service provided by the centres
- Number of individuals and groups formerly involved in management who continue to be involved increase their involvement
- Number of individuals and groups newly involved in management
- Satisfaction of individuals and groups involved in management with the change process"

CDF is an established organisation working with the active Community Unit of the Home Office and local authorities and community organisations nationally.

14.2. Comments by Keith Kemp, Community Matters:

"Comparisons between local authorities are notoriously difficult, partly because there are so many variables. However there are probably a few generalisations that could be made.

- Luton probably spends more on direct support for community centres than most Local authorities.
- It is fairly uncommon to link Community Development so directly with community centres as you do at present.

To some extent the strengths and weaknesses follow from the fact Community Centres have been invested in and are a fairly high profile council service.

- Community Centres have a high political profile.
- Community Centres are well resourced in terms of staff.
- There is not a strong tradition of community management of community buildings.

The proposals being made are viable. Community Matters believes the management of community buildings by local communities is not only viable but offers the potential for substantial added value in the areas of civic engagement and social capitol.

After saying that there are of course substantial challenges in moving from one system to another and as they say "the devil is in the detail". I think the main issues are:

- Being able to sell the vision to all stakeholders.
- That enough time is given to establish community management of community centres.
- That enough support and resources are given to the process and budget savings are seen as a long-term objective, rather than necessarily a short-term one.
- That building the capacity of community groups to run the community centres should be the priority task of the new community development resource.

I have also been impressed at the best value review and believe that there is a real desire to improve the service as well as make budget savings."

Community Matters is the national 'umbrella' organisation for community associations – current membership is in excess of 1200 organisations.

COMPARATOR TABLES

Table 1 – Spending on Community Development (2003-4 unless stated)

Authority	Population	Core CD (£)	Community Centres (£)	Corporate CD (£)	Grants to VCS (£)
Barking	155,600	374,000	750,000	n/a	1,600,000
Blackburn	137,471	1,600,000*	Not stated	n/a	500,000
Bradford	467,000	1,302,300**	Not clear	n/a	n/a
Brighton	247,817	Not available	0	n/a	n/a
Bristol	380,615	740,000	260,000***	n/a	2,300,000
Durham	87,656	Not available	0	n/a	n/a
Halton	121,700	208,070	611,000	n/a	n/a
Southampton	216,000	585,300	165,000	n/a	2,000,000
Southwark	240,000	1,200,000****	Not stated	4,400,000*****	8,000,000
Watford	79,729	10,000	1,016,990	n/a	1,500,000
Luton	184,371	1,607,052	1,274,112	n/a	159,000~

*Includes Community centres
**Figures for 2002-3. Base budget minus the Learning Services component (£445,100). Gross expenditure from all sources = £2,945,400.
***Operating costs, excluding staffing (whereas Barking's figure includes staffing costs).
****Including Service Agreements with external funders. Base budget between £500,000 and £600,000.
*****Unusually, a significant part of the discussion here concerned the contributions to community development in Southwark made by Housing and by area-based regeneration schemes (SRB, New Deal for Communities and Sure Start). It did not seem as if any of the other authorities has attempted this calculation of overall, corporate community development costs, though Southampton have been actively mapping community development activities provided by all sources across the city.
~ Includes £70,000 paid to schools for community room hire.

Table 2 – Community Centres in Comparator Authority Areas

Authority	Total Centres In Area	Owned By The Authority	Devolved to the Community
Barking	Not known	22	0
Blackburn	21	18	0*
Bradford	Not Known	23**	6?
Brighton	Not Known	0	0
Bristol	Not known	5	40
Durham	Not known***	0***	0
Halton	7	6****	1
Southampton	19	19	18*****
Southwark	Estimated 12-14	3	0
Watford	10	8	2
Luton	16	12	4

*Community Associations are involved in managing all the Council centres and there is multi-agency delivery from all of them, but it was said that "a lot of staff time goes into running facilities" and the Best Value inspection report has described the services as "too buildings focused".
**Defined as "Community Bases" within the Service Profile, not all of these are centres in the proper sense. Initial study suggests six of these are the location of offices of specialist community development/support units. The 23 also include a number of centres (five?) dedicated solely to Lifelong Learning, a function of Community Development within Bradford's organisational structure.
***Though the numbers of centres were not known, the interviewee was quite knowledgeable about them. Also, while Durham City Council owns no centres, they are directly responsible for the communal facilities in sheltered accommodation for the elderly.
****The ownership of the devolved centre is shared with two Housing Associations within the framework of a Company Limited by Guarantee.
*****The Community Association responsible for one of the centres has recently collapsed.
? (See Bradford) The interviewee quoted these figures, but seem to be contradicted by the Best Value report (received 02/10/03). There may have been a misunderstanding in the interview.

Table 3 – Location of Community Development in LA Structure

Authority	Chief Executive's	Major Service Block	Smaller Directorate
Barking	✓		
Blackburn	✓		
Bradford			✓
Brighton	✓		
Bristol		✓	
Durham	✓		
Halton		✓	
Southampton		✓	
Southwark	✓		
Watford			✓
Luton		✓	

Notes:-
The exact location of those outside the Chief Executive's area were:-
Community Development located in the Social Cohesion Division of the Housing and Regeneration Directorate – Southampton.
Community Development located in the Regeneration Division of the Neighbourhood and Housing Services Directorate – Bristol.
Community Development located in the Culture and Leisure Services Division of the Education and Social Inclusion Directorate – Halton.
Community Development is one of five front-line components (also Lifelong Learning, Youth, Early Years and Childcare, Neighbourhood Support, plus three back-line sections including Policy) of the Community Development and Lifelong Learning Department (which has a Director) – Bradford.
Community Development located in a Community Services Directorate, alongside Community Centres, Rights and Advice, International and Twinning, Play and Early Years – Watford.

Table 4 – Community development role in key corporate/Local Strategic Partnership strategies

Authority	Community Strategy	NRS	LSP support/ development	Other
Barking	Involved	Involved	Major role	
Blackburn			Involved	
Bradford	Major role		Major role	
Brighton		Involved		
Bristol		Major role	Major role	
Durham			Major role	Role in creating a C'ty network
Halton		Major role	Major role	
Southampton	Major role		Major role	
Southwark		Major role		Role in creating a C'ty network
Watford				
Luton	Involved	Major role		

Table 5 – Scoring the Comparator Authorities' Community Development functions on a range of indicators

Authority	Population	Strategy	Fieldwork	Grants Admin	Community Premises	Consultation/ Involvement	Location	Budget	Staff
Barking	155,600	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Blackburn	137,471	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Bradford	467,700	✓✓✓			✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Brighton	247,817	✓				✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
Bristol	380,615	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Durham	87,656	✓				✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
Halton	121,700	✓✓			✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Southampton	216,000	✓✓	✓✓		✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Southwark	240,000	✓✓			✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Watford	79,729				✓✓✓		✓	n/a	✓✓
Luton	180,000		✓✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓

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