

## Economic Development, Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel

### Housing Neighbourhood & Building Services - Community Centres

#### Overview

Housing, Neighbourhood & Building Services directly manage 4 community centres within the city: Charles Dickens Centre (Buckland), Cosham Community Centre, Paulsgrove Community Centre, and Somerstown Community Centre. All four centres sit in areas of high social housing stock but operate in a tenure blind way. The aim is that the centres cover their costs to enable them to operate to the benefit of the whole community.

#### Community Centres Response to Pandemic

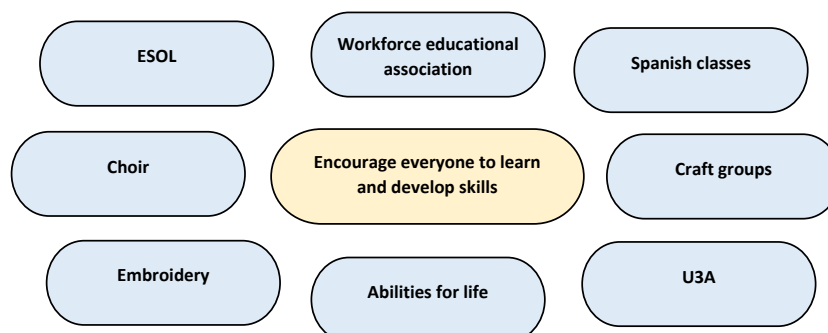
During the pandemic, each centre was closed to its business-as-usual activities. However, the sites were used to support essential services permitted under the covid restrictions such as:

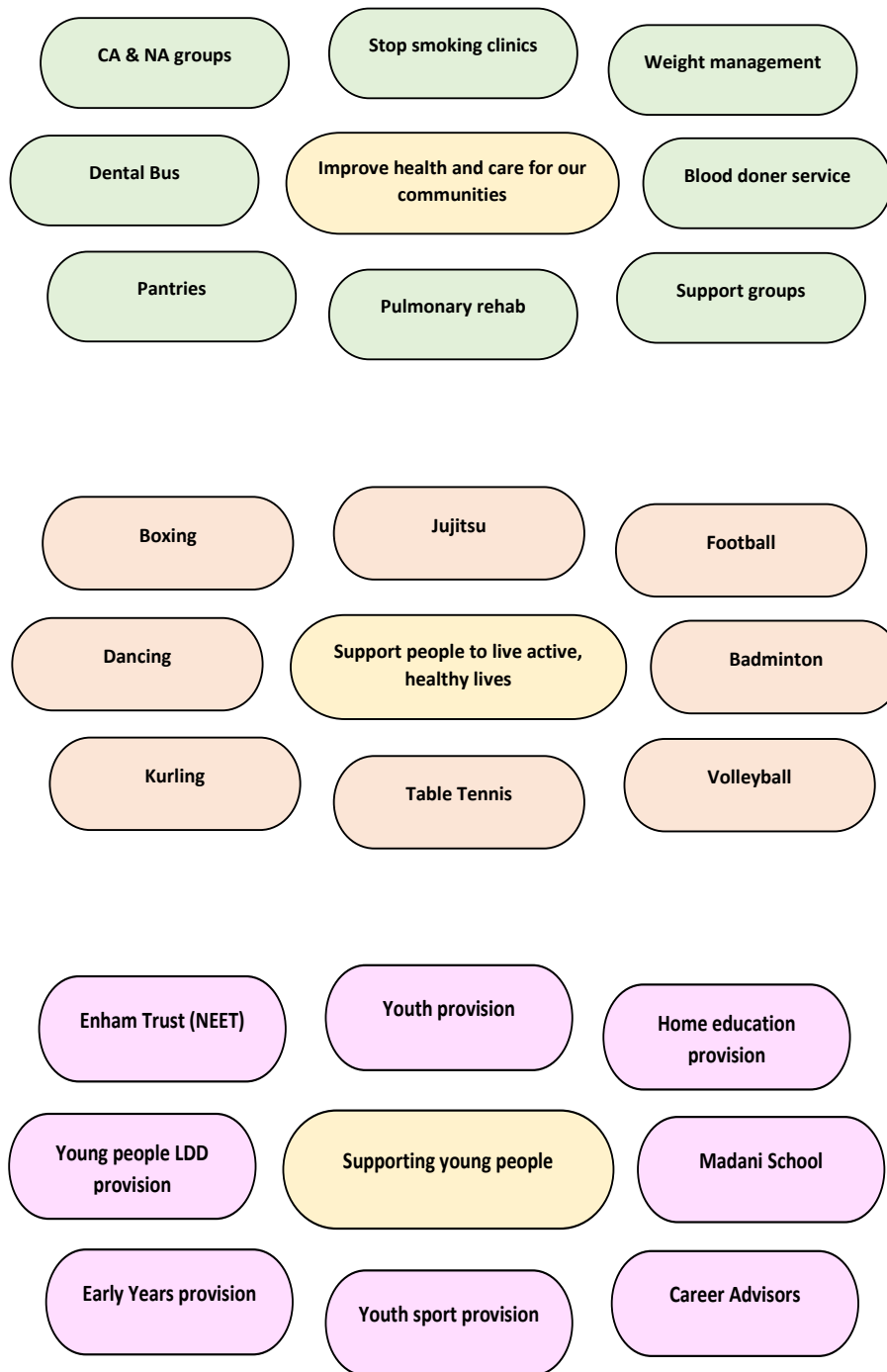
- Covid asymptomatic testing centre
- Pop-up vaccination clinics
- Continued to support and enable blood doner sessions
- Training sessions for Rowan's Hospice
- Support groups including respite for carers

#### Activity Programme, with Social Value and Health Benefits

The facilities at each of community centres differ for each site, some have dancehalls, sports halls, community cafe and music studios, others have splash pools, snooker and community facilities.

It is important that our centres run a diverse programme of activities to reach all members of the communities they serve. We seek to align with Portsmouth City Council's corporate priorities and aims and below demonstrates how some of the activities across our centres meet those priorities and aims.





Our community centre spaces are also used by services and support groups on a longer-term hire basis so that they can offer locality-based provision. Tenants include Abilities for Life, Volunteer's Hub, Workers Educational Association, Well-being Service and Room 1 - support for autistic and neurodivergent adults. Other long-term tenants include a nursery in Paulsgrove, the Music Hub, and an estate services team.

The community centres are signed up to The Hive's warm places initiatives.

## **Demand**

Each of our 4 community centres are busy with a varied programme, although there is slightly less demand for Paulsgrove community centre.

## **Barriers to Engagement and steps taken in response**

- 1) Our community centres operate in areas of deprivation and therefore there are affordability issues with accessing paid-for activities and travelling to free provision outside of the local area, with greater impact to those in the Paulsgrove area as many services and facilities are based in the south of the city.

Our hire costs are reviewed on an annual basis however due to the pandemic, and now the cost-of-living crisis we have frozen our hire charges since 2020 to ensure that hirers are able to offer provision without passing additional costs to attendees.

This decision does result in impact on the service budget, in particular at a time when the premises costs have risen significantly, which is why our long-term tenants are vital in sustaining the centres.

Offering locality-based services aids accessibility for local communities - we have raised awareness of the opportunities that exist to hire our spaces internally within PCC, and through updating our website and our social media presence and our visual display boards.

We have supported other directorates in increasing local opportunities e.g., the library service ran a space-based activity at the Charles Dickens Centre, and we have supported the organisers of the Live Well events and the We Shine event in Paulsgrove.

- 2) Awareness of the activities that are on offer

When we speak to local people, they are often unaware of what is available to them locally. We are reviewing our communications strategy and engaging with local communities in different ways and reaching out to local representatives to build understanding and look for opportunities for partnership working.

- 3) The age of the spaces we have

Whilst the Somerstown Hub and Charles Dickens Centre are modern spaces the Cosham and Paulsgrove community centres are older buildings which may be less attractive as spaces.

We are considering our options with both centres, working in partnership to understand what opportunities exist to improve the facilities.

- 4) Meeting the individual needs of the community

In the south of the city, we had previously experienced barriers around providing multi-cultural activities however we have now increased our programme to include activities such as a cross-cultural women's group and English lessons for those for whom English is a second language.

## **Increasing participation**

Recently we have worked with our resident engagement team to understand what our tenants wish to participate in locally and there have been engagement events in Paulsgrove, Cosham and Somerstown linked to specific projects, from which we are analysing the feedback to understand if there are opportunities to make changes to best meet the needs and wants of the local community.

We aim to embed our service in the community and build relationships with residents as well as building key relationships with partnership organisations and other community groups.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach. Each community has differing needs which can change over time, and it is important that the service continues to reflect and seek feedback to ensure we are meeting those needs.

## **Community Centre Team**

We are fortunate to have fantastic team in the HNB community centre service. The team are a front facing service who deal with a vast range of enquiries. The team, on a daily basis signpost to a range of services, such as the Cost-of-Living Hub, CAB, the local housing office, Safe Clean and Tidy and You Trust and are seeking to see how they can support the Leisure Card.

There is a good working relationship with colleagues in Culture, Leisure and Regulatory services and where appropriate we share information and learning.

## **The Future**

The community centre service is always keen to seek opportunities to work with other departments and organisations to best serve the communities that the centres are situated in. We have a fixed pricing structure across the centres and offer a 20% discount to charities and CiCs. <https://www.pycportsmouth.co.uk/community/>