

**Policy & Resources Committee**

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**Date:** Tuesday 3 August 2021  
**Title:** Report - External Organisations

**a) Barns Centre (Cllrs Deacock and Dodds)**

The AGM for the year ending March 2021 was held on Thursday 22nd July. This year showed the consequences of the pandemic, when the Centre has been open briefly and closed for extensive periods. The Centre has normally regular events/classes and one-offs, weddings, parties etc. The latter are normally booked months in advance and this has had a dramatic effect upon income. In broad terms income in 2020 was £149641 and in 2021 £27,789. However, this does not tell the whole story as careful management has made use of other income streams from the Government via SODC and the furlough scheme, and insurance.

The Centre is trying to re-establish usage but there is a noticeable caution. The trustees thanked the staff for their dedication to the work of the Barns Centre in extremely testing circumstances.

**b) Citizens Advice (Cllr Austin)**

CA Thame are cautiously opening up the offices and have advisers working from Market House on most days of the week now. CA are seeing a limited number of clients face to face through booked appointments only.

One of the long standing supervisors resigned last month but CA have successfully recruited a replacement who will be joining on September 6th.

CA continues to recruit and train volunteers. Depending on Covid, the next training course, scheduled to start in September, may return to being classroom based as opposed to on-line.

Statistics analysis attached for Thame for the recent period as illustration.

Information received from Tricia Hook- Thame Advice Service Manager

**c) Health Hub (including Community Hub Pilot) (Cllr Champken-Woods)**

Hub is extending to include Amersham and Buckingham.

**d) NALC (Cllr Dyer)**

Nothing significant to report. NALC have continued to lobby Government on behalf of the Town & Parish sector, and have focussed almost entirely on the challenges facing Councils during the pandemic, sharing advice and best practice throughout. The Acting Town Clerk continues to share the weekly NALC and monthly OALC update emails with Councillors.

NALC's reduced programme of events and courses all remain online only for the foreseeable future.

**e) Red Kite Family Centre (Cllr Emery)**

With the aid of your regular donations and the continuing support we receive from business and the local councils I am pleased to say that we have 'weathered the storm' of the pandemic well in financial terms and are confident that our operation is sustainable well beyond the end of this current financial year. It is still our intention to relaunch the Friends scheme at some point in order to attract further community support,

and we think this coming autumn is the most likely time for that to happen for reasons that will become clear as you read on.

After a brief period during the autumn 2020 between the end of the first lockdown and the beginning of the second, we were able to run some centre-based activities again. However, with Lockdown 3 being introduced in January, all activities had to stop and all of the staff were furloughed for some of their hours. Each staff member did keep working for some hours each week. Special weekly activity newsletters were produced (still on website if you would like to look) and personal contact was maintained with families we knew were most in need of support and encouragement. We were also able to keep the preparation of our new outdoor activity space at Moreton Barn Farm going and this is now nearing completion. With great relief, centre-based sessions have now started up again in both Thame and Chinnor and many are oversubscribed as we are still having to limit numbers so as to operate in as covid-safe an environment as we can. The staff are working closely with NHS colleagues ensuring that as many mothers with 'newborns' are able to come to sessions and meet other mums.

In the middle of all this, as you may have heard, Amy Spicer, our Family Centre Leader announced that she was leaving as she was taking up a new post as Family Support Manager at Auditory Verbal UK, a national charity working with families with hearing impaired children. Amy had been with us for 7 years, firstly as leader of the state-run children's centre, and then continuing into the new role of Family Centre Leader when we became a community run charity. It was Amy's commitment to managing this transition that played such a big part in the success of keeping the centre alive and gaining the support from so many in the local area. We quite understand that Amy felt it was time to move on, and she actually left on April 12th. Because of lockdown we haven't yet been able to say a proper 'thank you' to Amy so we have arranged a farewell barbecue for her on the evening of Tuesday July 20th.

Recruitment of a new Family Centre Leader has proved challenging at this time, but we are hopeful of having a new person in post in time for the new year's programme in September. In the meantime, Catherine Myles and Helen Burton are joint acting Family Centre Leaders and they are doing an excellent job at not only 'keeping the ship afloat' but working hard to ensure that we are in touch with as many families within the local community as we can be.

Sadly, at the end of May, Emma Spink the Administrator, also moved on to a new job so as you can imagine, life has been pretty hectic! We will be interviewing for this post later this week so hopefully we will have a new person in this role very soon.

As a footnote, and on a slightly lighter note, you may have heard that half the Family Centre roof blew off last July. I am pleased to report that, after many delays, the county (who we lease the building from) agreed that it was a fault in the original installation that caused this and so the cost was met by their insurance rather than our hard-won bank balance! A new roof was installed in January.

Report by John Hulett.

**f) Thame Business Forum (Cllr Dyer)**

Nothing to report but will hopefully be able to resume Business Forum meetings in the Autumn.

**g) Thame Senior Friendship Centre (Cllr Midwinter)**

Thame Senior Friendship Centre remains one of the few centres that re-opened as of 18th May 2021 and the only one that managed to open in between lockdowns.

During lockdown we applied via Oxford City Council to be part of the Kickstart Scheme Gateway for Oxfordshire.

The scheme aims to provide employment for those on universal credit between the ages of 16 and 24 for a period of 26 weeks. This allows the individual to gain skills to support them in order to find full time employment.

TSFC is part of cohort 3, the Department for Work and Pensions pay the individuals salary for the whole of the 26 weeks, plus we get an additional £1,500 to support training over the 26-week period. This additional funding has secured training from the Oxford Hub for the 26-weeks, and it will support additional IT/materials required.

This scheme was started as those individuals in this age group were found to be disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic and it is envisaged that they will find long time employment as a result. The employer will give the individual a life changing opportunity to acquire the necessary skills required for employment.

As restrictions are due to be lifted as of 19th July, TSFC will continue to be cautious in supporting our elderly members.

Due to the increase in our waiting list, we are investigating in a new service at The Barns which will commence in September. This will go some way to supporting those in the community with dementia and their families. We have had very encouraging discussions with the dementia adviser for Oxfordshire who will support us going forward and we will be arranging training for all staff and volunteers in the near future.

There are some exciting times ahead for TSFC and some changes to ensure we are sustainable going forward.

We have gained some younger volunteers, 2 young trustees but still have lots to do and are always looking for more volunteers to support the elderly community of Thame and surrounding villages.

There will undoubtedly be hard times ahead for the charity and the members, but it is essential that the TSFC is innovative in what it offers members and continues to be a friendly and welcoming environment for all concerned. As stated many times before we need to be flexible to meet the challenges ahead and TSFC will continue to work closely with other agencies and facilities so we continue to address the issues facing the elderly within our communities.

A significant amount of fundraising will need to be undertaken over the coming years in conjunction with engagement with local communities/businesses and national organisations.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trustees and volunteers for their support since March 2020, but most importantly Gill and Kate for their tireless efforts during these difficult times. Gill, our manager retired in September 2020 after 14 years at TSFC and Kate is now the new manager.

Well done to Kate as we have had an enormous task to get TSFC up and running again with staff, volunteers and some trustees undertaking regular lateral flow tests to ensure we maintain a safe environment for our members. We should not underestimate the challenges everyone has faced in ensuring the elderly community of Thame has been supported during the pandemic.

**h) Thame & District Housing Association (Cllr Emery)**

As of 20th July, no report has been given. This should be available next Council meeting.

**i) Thame Youth Memorial Trust (Cllr Tipping)**

Maintenance: The overall lettering and look of some of the stone work and lettering has become a concern. We are testing new cleaning agents to help restore the look of the stonework. Initial tests look positive on helping this.

Also tree cutting needs to be looked at to see if trimming back overhang can help with the slippery conditions on the stone/ walking area during bad weather.

Applications: there are a few applications pending at this current time but are being processed and in due course will be added to the memorial.

At our last meeting a new chair was elected in the form of Alison Biddle.

**Social updates:**

Myself and fellow members are going to try and adjust the website and try and keep us more up to date on social media through updates on the work done there eg the restoring of the stonework. This is hoping to give us more engagement to the locals in Thame.

**j) Thame Youth Projects Group (Cllr Tipping)**

Youth Work: numbers are remaining encouraging with good attendance at our Wednesday Park life sessions.

Property: 3 initial Architects were shortlisted to conduct a feasibility study on the New Youth Centre build. The architects chosen were Acanthus Clews, with the report expected back by the end of August.

**k) 21st Century Thame (Cllr Fickling)**

*Nothing received at 02/08/2021.*

**l) Welfare Trust (Cllr Champken-Woods)**

Nothing to report from Welfare Trust.