

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-075-2010/11

Date of meeting: 18 April 2011



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolios: Finance and Economic Development

Subject: Furniture Exchange Scheme

Responsible Officer: Chris Overend (01992 564247)

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That approval be given to the DDF item, in the sum of £20,000, towards the re-establishment of a Furniture Exchange Scheme for the District, being retained within the budget during the 2011/12 financial year.

Executive Summary:

A Furniture Exchange/Recycling Scheme for the District ran for the period between February 2007 and July 2008, operating from the District Council's Depot in Town Mead, Waltham Abbey. The scheme was run in partnership with the Lighthouse Project, 'a not for profit' organisation which had experience of running a similar scheme in Brentwood.

The individuals involved in the setting up of the initial scheme felt there was enough impetus and encouragement to look at the establishment of a scheme elsewhere in the District and formed a Working Group to look at the possibilities. A site in Market Square, Waltham Abbey with the potential for use as a 'shop front' premises for a scheme was identified. In supporting the re-establishment of a scheme and in recognising the potential of the Market Square site, the Cabinet (at its meeting on 5 February 2009 (Minute 148 refers) agreed to a District Development Fund (DDF) sum of £20,000 being approved in respect of the annual rent costs of premises.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Through such a scheme, disadvantaged people are able to source good quality essential furniture at minimal cost. The improved quality of life they can enjoy can contribute directly to an increase in self-esteem, family harmony, integration with the local community and improved prospects of training and employment. A scheme also offers people who wish to dispose of unwanted furniture, the opportunity to contribute positively to the local community of enhancing the quality of life of others and improving the environment by reducing the amount of waste destined directly for landfill, thus helping to meet recycling targets. Moreover, it provides an excellent job opportunity for those with learning disabilities, or other specialist employment needs associated with health or social problems.

A furniture recycling scheme represents good value for money. The cost of sourcing, collecting, supplying and delivering furniture to each household requesting assistance is an average of £100, although it is recognised that current operational costs are minimal. This figure excludes reconditioned white goods. Given this sum to spend, households would be

able to source, through the second-hand market, only a fraction of the items supplied through the scheme.

In terms of potential demand in the District, the indications are that approximately 300 residents each year move into its accommodation, seeking furniture, because they have become homeless, are fleeing domestic violence or are allocated a home for the first time.

There is a recognised need for a Furniture Recycling Scheme in the District. It could bring substantial benefits in terms of job creation (particularly for those with learning disabilities), skills training, disadvantaged people being able to access good quality furniture at minimal costs, a positive contribution to the environment and helping the Council meet its recycling targets. Schemes have operated successfully in the District and elsewhere in Essex for many years. The scheme is tried and tested and would bring considerable benefits.

At its meeting on 27 September 2010 (Minute 15 refers) the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee agreed a number of changes to the administration of the District Development Fund to manage the reserve more effectively in view of the current financial situation and the likely increased demand on the Fund when spending cuts were required. One of those changes included the retrospective application of a two year time limit on all existing bids, of which the money towards the Furniture Exchange Scheme is one.

Other Options for Action:

The other option would be to refuse to continue setting aside the DDF amount of £20,000 in respect of the potential new scheme. This would mean a missed opportunity for the District Council and its partners in terms of their roles in community wellbeing and environmental protection, and for the operation of a much needed and highly regarded scheme.

Report:

1. The closure of the original scheme came about as a consequence of safety issues on site, primarily concerned with vehicular movements and public access. Attempts were made by the various partners involved, including the Lighthouse Project, Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) and the District Council, to resolve the issues concerned but ultimately a decision was taken to close the facility.

2. To assist in the establishment of the original scheme, the Cabinet, at its meeting on 20 December 2004 (Minute 98 refers) had approved the waiving of the annual charges and service charges arising in respect of the use of the spaces and Town Mead Depot. The £20,000 DDF item approved by Cabinet in 2009 was to reflect what would be a reasonable annual rental costs for a site from which a Furniture Exchange Scheme might operate.

3. It is envisaged that, over a period of time, the scheme will become self-financing. It is therefore recommended that, once the scheme is up and running again, the trading position of the scheme be kept under regular review.

4. The bid in respect of the Market Square premises proved unsuccessful. Nonetheless the DDF amount was set aside and the Working Party continued to look at other options. The possibility of a scheme being operated in partnership with St Clare's Hospice is now being investigated and discussions have reached an advanced stage. Given the recognised benefits a scheme would bring, and as an indication of the Council's support, Cabinet is asked to approve the retention of the DDF item in the budget during the 2011/12 financial year, with a view to it being used towards the re-establishment of a scheme in the District.

5. With regard to future provision, an assessment of organisations and service outlets

currently dealing with surplus furniture in the District, revealed a number of larger reputable charities which had a number of outlets which might be used. The indications are that one of these has several shop outlets at various locations in the District as well as the level of operation required to carry a furniture scheme as originally envisaged. Further in depth discussions on the operation of the scheme would be required but it is envisaged it would be on the following lines:

- The new partner to undertake all special collections.
- The new partner to retain all income from special collections.
- A grant of between £20-£25,000 to be made to the charity from the current funding of special collections, with the Council to retain the difference.
- New partner to take special collection phone-calls from residents and for there to be a Service Level Agreement between the new partner and the District Council.
- New partner to make available reconditioned furniture.
- New partner to keep all income from sales of furniture.
- The District Council to provide tipping facilities for the remainder of the special collections that cannot be recycled, reused or refurbished.

6. A further report on the outcome of these discussions and the implementation of the scheme will be submitted to Cabinet in due course.

Resource Implications:

There will be no additional costs arising. The budget already includes the DDF item of £20,000 in respect of a Furniture Recycling Scheme. The recommendation is for that amount to be retained within the budget for the 2011/12 Financial Year.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Not known at this stage although arrangements in respect of the governance of the scheme, involving the partner organisations, would have to be determined.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Environmental benefits of recycling.

Consultation Undertaken:

Discussions involving scheme operators, VAEF, District Council Members and Officers.

Background Papers:

Correspondence and other papers in respect of previous and proposed schemes.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

Given that the main elements are already in place, it is not envisaged that the scheme would encounter the health and safety issues that were experienced with the scheme at Town Mead. Nonetheless a thorough risk assessment would be undertaken in liaison with the scheme operators.

Equality and Diversity:

The scheme would have a positive Equalities and Diversity impact given the benefits to

disadvantaged people, those with learning difficulties, the homeless and those fleeing domestic violence.

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in the this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications: No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
N/A.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
N/A.