

# **Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee**

**Date of meeting: 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021**



**Portfolio:** Customer & Corporate Support Services

**Subject:** Universal Credit Impact update – Establishment of the Epping Community Hub

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## **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**To note the progress on the establishment of a Community Hub at the Epping Civic Offices.**

### **Report:**

1. Members of this Committee will recall that as a result of the work of the Universal Credit Impact Working Group a Multi-Agency Hub was developed at the Museum in Waltham Abbey in early 2020. This Hub was established to bring various agencies and relevant EFDC services together to help customers who had been impacted by welfare reform and particularly those with more complex needs. Such customers could work with different organisations in a single visit to find solutions to their problems. Sadly, the advent of Covid-19 curtailed this work relatively early in its life and during 2020 a virtual signposting resource was developed bringing the outcomes of the Universal Credit Group's work and aligning it with the new challenges presented by Covid, particularly with extensions to Wellbeing and Employment initiatives.

2. In 2020 the Cabinet approved the concept of a Community Hub at the Civic Offices. The new Hub will pick up the lessons learnt from the former Universal Credit Impact Working Group and the new impacts on customers that Covid-19 has brought but also recognising the opportunities that the newly refurbished Civic Offices can offer to make it a true community asset.

3. The vision for the Community Hub is to be a place where:

- Better and more connected services are provided to our customers;
- There is an inclusive multi-agency approach to delivering customer services;
- The focus is on real customer needs and to improve people's lives by engaging with a range of services with a single visit to the Hub;
- Customer journeys are mapped to achieve excellent touchpoint and handoff arrangements for customers;
- Community organisations can come together to meet specific needs whether it be activities or events to strengthen community bonds;
- Partners collaborate for the benefit and enhancement of the individual services they all provide;
- There are benefits for all partners that will lead to service improvements that are understood and acknowledged by all;
- Community Insight Data and engagement will identify community need and inform future service delivery;

- There are complementary aims and activities with other community hubs within the district.

4. Work on the establishment of the Community Hub has been taking place in two ways. Firstly, there is the physical creation of the Hub space as part of the Accommodation Programme within the Civic Offices. Secondly, there has been engagement with partners who wish to come and work with us in the Hub and establishing practical arrangements built around customer service journeys. The design and on-going delivery of the Hub is being managed by a Steering Group, chaired by the Customer Service Director involving key EFDC services and Partners. Those having representation on the Steering Group are:

EFDC Services:        Customer Services  
                               Business Support (Concierge)  
                               Community and Wellbeing  
                               Housing and Homelessness  
                               Revenues and Benefits

External Partners     Essex County Council – Library and Registration Services  
                               Citizens Advice  
                               DWP/Job Centre Plus  
                               Epping Forest Foodbank  
                               Voluntary Action Epping Forest  
                               Chess  
                               Full Circle Service  
                               Family Solutions  
                               Changing Pathways  
                               NACRO

The intention is to have a customer representation on the Steering Group to also help inform the Hub's development and priorities.

The principal objectives of the Steering Group are to:

- Agree and review customer journeys within the Hub to maximise customer satisfaction and benefits;
- Agree and co-ordinate future plans and activities to meet customer needs in the most effective manner;
- Review customer feedback and community engagement outcomes;
- Resolve any operational difficulties or issues that have escalated to the Steering Group;
- Establish a monitoring and evaluation framework to demonstrate the benefits of the Community Hub;
- Agree how best to integrate other partners into the Hub.
- Ensure that the work of the Epping Hub is complementing other Hubs within the district and also other community groups.

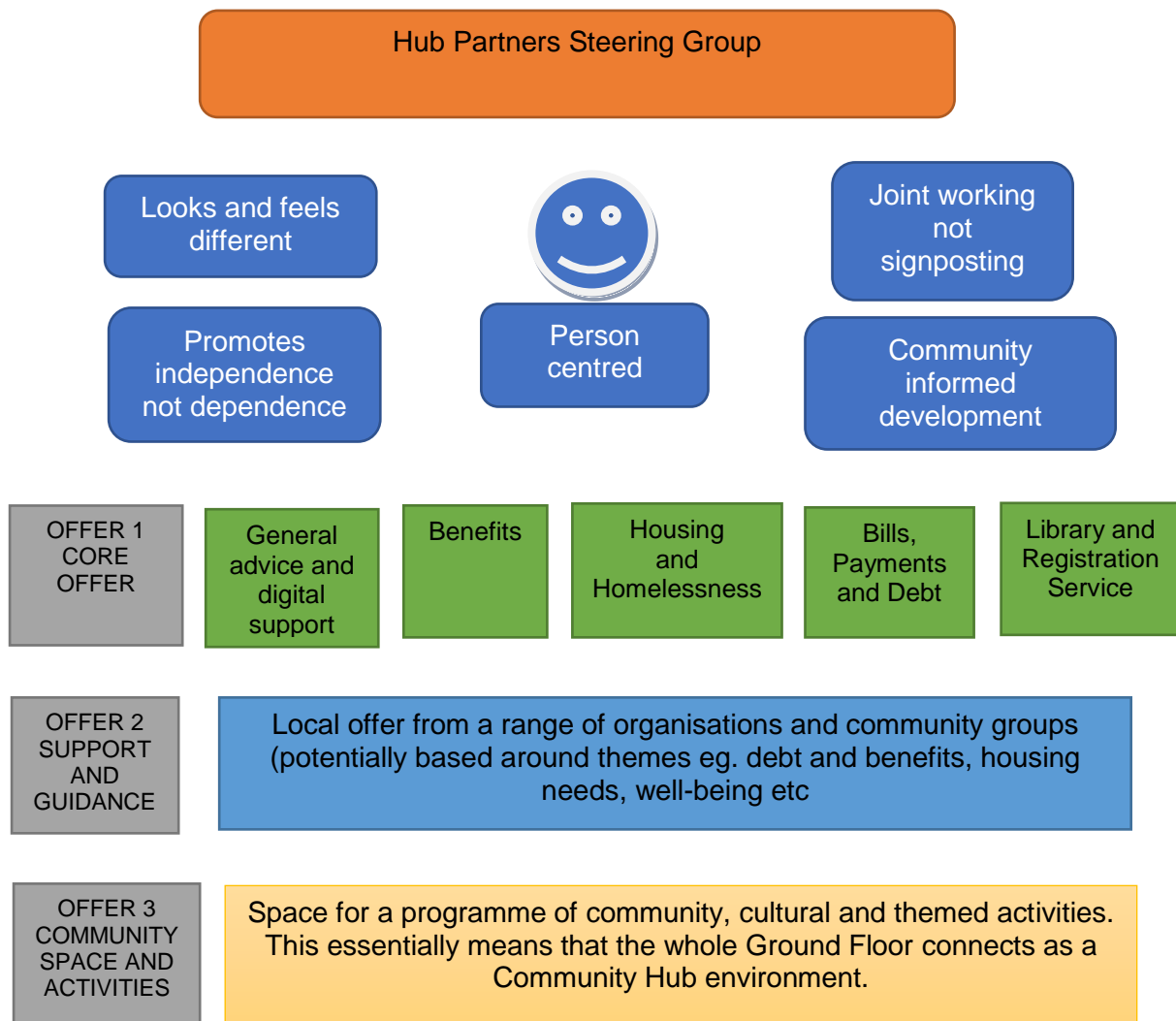
The Steering Group will aim to make sure the Hub remains relevant to on-going events, particularly with the continued effects of Covid-19. An example of this will be the end of the Government's furlough scheme and an anticipated rise in unemployment, where early intervention will be needed to help customers in acute need.

5. The actual design of the hub is underpinned by a set of principles:

- Looks and feels different to traditional service delivery
- Centred on the customer not the service
- Promotes independence not dependence
- Focused on joint working and not signposting

- Developed with local community engagement and needs in mind

The diagram below brings the design together:



The activity of the Hub provides three key offers to its users and customers:

**Offer 1: A core offer of advice**

The core offer of advice will be delivered through a dedicated team of EFDC services and hub partners. This includes general advice and guidance, housing, homelessness and rough sleeping, welfare and housing benefits and council tax support, well-being, financial inclusion, digital support and social isolation.

This will centre on prevention and supporting the most vulnerable, identifying opportunities to make an impact through intervening earlier and tackling issues more quickly to prevent escalation and reducing the likelihood for repeat need for services in the future.

**Offer 2: Access to a range of information, support and guidance**

The core offer will be enhanced by a range of information, support and guidance tailored to local need and delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations and community groups, as well as local residents volunteering their time. As a growth model, this is expected

to change and grow with time and create a location for enabling individuals to build new skills through self-serve, assisted self-serve and confidence building.

**Offer 3: A community space and programme of community activities**

The hub will also offer space to deliver activities and events for the community, reflecting the specific interests of local people.

6 The next steps in the implementation of the Hub building up to its opening on or about the 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 (dependant on Covid-19 restrictions) are to be discussed at the next meeting of the Steering Group on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2021. This will include communications and publicity around the Hub and its opening and ensuring the Hub can operate in a Covid-safe way. Appropriate risk assessments will be carried out in conjunction with the Council's Health and Safety team.

**Reason for decision:**

To make the Committee aware of the progress of the Epping Community Hub.

**Options considered and rejected:**

To delay the report until the Hub has opened in June 2021.

**Consultation undertaken:**

Consultation has taken place with the services and partners working within the Hub.

**Resource implications:**

The Hub is established on the ground floor of the Epping Civic Offices.

**Background Papers:**

None.