

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-049-2020-21

Date of meeting: 03rd December 2020



Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Civic Accommodation and Community Hub

Responsible Officer: Louise Wade 07548 145612 /Jennifer Gould 07548 145639

Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) Cabinet to consider the opportunities for establishing a community hub; and**
- (2) In the context of establishing a community hub, Cabinet to understand the current discussions in relation to partnership working**

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Establishing a vision for a community hub as defined by the council, partners and community will ensure services are designed based on the collective need.

Other Options for Action:

To establish the building as a space where partners are co-located, with no additional opportunity for benefits from establishing a community hub.

To offer the space to commercial tenants which will generate income.

To remove or reduce grants with partners which at this stage would disrupt the direction of travel for reframing the relationship and establishment of the community hub.

Report:

Partnership working during the current pandemic

1. The impact of Covid-19 and the associated need to swiftly mobilise a local support hub back in March, provided a clear illustration of the value and benefit of partnership working in the Epping Forest district. The 'Covid response - Epping Forest Community Hub,' whilst hosted by the District Council, relies heavily on the involvement and support of the voluntary community sector (VSC) and, specifically, Voluntary Action Epping Forest. Clinically extremely vulnerable residents who are required to shield continue to be able to access a range of collaboratively delivered services including; shopping, prescription collection, befriending and signposting to specialist support. Through partnership working the Council has been able to draw on invaluable wider

resources, not least from a pool of dedicated local volunteers and mutual aid groups, therefore increasing capacity and enabling responsive, friendly and accessible support to be delivered to those most in need.

Establishing a Community Hub

2. To date the conversations around the use of the Civic have been focused on the utilisation of the building by partners. We now have an opportunity to look at this through a different lens and consider the use of the Civic as the heart of a genuine community hub approach to the delivery of services that will benefit residents across the district.

3. A community hub can mean different things in different places. Whilst co-locating services may enable our residents to access services more easily and an improvement in customer journey, there are also greater opportunities which lend themselves to contributing towards building better and more integrated services and enabling regeneration. We have the opportunity for the Civic to be a focal point for our community, not just in accessing services but also in terms of how the additional space is used.

4. Libraries already provide an opportunity as a place to access certain services within a single space within the community and enable that sense of community. We are already in active discussions with Essex regarding the relocation of the library to the Civic and this will be a contributing factor in the success of establishing a community hub approach. Whilst the library is one step towards that, there is a much greater opportunity available that will ensure the Civic becomes the heart of the high street for our residents.

5. Referencing the work of the Power to Change charitable trust (1), a community hub can be set up and run to provide one or more of the following:

- Facilities for the use of the local community to ensure a healthy, active and economically thriving population.
- Services for the local community, directly or indirectly.
- Opportunities for community engagement, volunteering, the empowerment of local people.
- The 'added value' of a thriving community hub which enhances community life, e.g. providing a focal point for local people, providing a sense of community, providing spaces for people to meet, etc.

6. There are clear benefits to establishing such a hub within the refurbished Civic building and one that would extend the use of the building beyond just the office space occupied by partners. As an example, it could provide us with the opportunity for cultural and wellbeing activities in the committee space.

7. Establishing a community hub starts with understanding customers' needs, working in partnership to design and deliver the outcomes required for the community. Whilst many services are accessible online, understanding the demographics and needs of each customer group will ensure the services and spaces designed are based on data and feedback. Creating a shared vision and plan that meets the needs of our residents, ensuring partners are aligned in the overall outcomes of the hub, and involvement from residents themselves will set us up for success.

8. Any work on the establishment of a community hub approach (with the Civic at its heart) would establish the start of a community hub approach and model across the district. With the Civic building at the centre, our satellite offices across the district would mean we could provide a consistent service model and more ability to access our services for those residents that do not live in Epping. For example, Loughton Broadway, The Limes Centre and ultimately the development of a Waltham Abbey Hub will deliver similar focal points for communities across the district and enable the delivery of localised, targeted services to those community residents as part of the Council's wider hub approach. All of this would be part of the wider customer journeys of our

residents that include the digital channels, that can be accessed by residents at home and they will also be able to access within the Civic itself and additionally at our other hubs across the district.

9. Part of the plan to create a community hub would need to carefully consider the operations of the building, opening hours, facilities management and security. All of this is achievable, and it starts with getting the early stage design established and will minimise the financial cost of change.

10. To date conversations have taken place with the following organisations, Epping Forest District Citizens Advice (EFCA), Voluntary Action Epping Forest (VAEF) and early discussions with Foodbank Epping.

Current partnership operating discussions

11. Teams across EFDC work in partnership with varied public, private and third sector organisations. One of our primary partners is Epping Forest District Citizens Advice (EFCA) who play an integral role in complementing our own services supporting residents across the district. EFCA are currently provided with an annual grant of £155,000 to deliver services that support the wellbeing of residents in relation to financial, emotional, mental and physical health through the delivery of expert advice and assistance both in person (restrictions associated with Covid notwithstanding), on the telephone and, increasingly, through digital means.

12. Historically, EFCA has been monitored and measured against a set of outputs, however, recent changes in the stewardship of the EFCA (new CEO, 50% turnover of Board of Trustees) together with the shifting landscape resultant from Covid presents an opportunity to reframe our expectations to those which are outcome focussed, add the most value and are most impactful for residents across the district.

13. Initial discussion with the CEO of EFCA have already taken place and a guiding set of principles for shaping requirements of the grant agreed. These new requirements will be underpinned by a partnership approach that tangibly achieves real outcomes for residents. For example, utilising EFCA's expertise around money and debt advice to get upstream of homelessness prevention and tackling social isolation and vulnerability of elderly residents through the facilitation of Scam Prevention work.

14. While there has been some discussion about the outputs of EFCA to date not adequately reflecting the grant sum, the EFCA's recent change in leadership, the strides made in agreeing a set of guiding principles focussed on outcomes and impact along with the will and commitment to genuine collaboration demonstrated by EFCA deserves a similar commitment from the Council. To reduce EFCA's grant amid a global pandemic which has increased demand and at a time when alternative funding is likely to be scarce would arguably disrupt the very solid direction of travel of our partnership with EFCA and deny them the opportunity to demonstrate the value they can add to the agreed outcome focussed approach.

15. While working in partnership with EFCA is not solely reliant on establishing a community hub it will provide a one stop shop style approach to the delivery of services, encourage and enable organic conversations between officers who, together, can structure much more comprehensive solutions and support that make the most of crisis response and longer term community based social recovery activity.

16. Discussions with VAEF on 16th November 2020, saw us agree to underpin our partnership with VAEF's inclusion in the community hub; initially at the Civic Offices, but, more broadly, as an integral part of the Council's overall community hub approach to service delivery. VAEF have submitted their requirements which are currently being considered and a tour of the Civic Offices is being arranged so that the CEO and Chair of VAEF Board can see the how the space is developing.

Moving the hub forward

17. As a commitment to developing the wider hub approach and working with partners, and on the basis there is commitment from partners to focus on the agreed outcomes, we would look to offer the space at a rate that would be no more expensive to the partners than they are currently paying. This would also be at a discount to the rates to commercial clients.

18. The first phase to this work, would be to establish co-location of services enabling closer working relationships. We are currently in the process of understanding the specific requirements of EFCA and VAEF. With limited space within the Civic we are looking at the most optimal way of working and customer journey needs to allow for the space to work in the way that is beneficial to our residents.

19. We would also be looking to expand the hub beyond the discussions with EFCA and VAEF, exploring the opportunity to develop further integrated service offerings with other partner organisations, e.g. Foodbank, DWP, CCG.

20. An additional requirement that will be met through the delivery of the accommodation programme is the implementation of Govroam. Govroam is a national roaming service which provides 'zero touch' internet access to public sector staff across the UK. This will further enhance our ability to work with partners across public sector, including the NHS and emergency services and additionally our colleagues at Essex County Council.

21. Another key benefit to the delivery of the accommodation programme is the commercialisation of the 2nd floor and the opportunity to lease 323 to Qualis. Whilst this is not directly related to the establishment of the community hub, it will ultimately deliver benefit to our community through the income we will generate as a result of letting the space.

22. This project will deliver outcomes that are more than the sum of their parts and more than a building. The plan and implementation of the community hub will be further developed through 2021.

Resource Implications:

The financial resource implication for partners should be neutral based on the target of offering the space at a cost which is no more expensive than that already being paid.

We would be looking for resources within the partnership to provide capacity to delivering the community hub.

Council resources will be required to establish and deliver the hub in line with the vision.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Any spaces leased to external partners or let via licences, will require a legal agreement between the Council and said party.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

A reduction in carbon footprint for partners, council employees and residents through the removal of the need to travel between locations.

The Council's Community Resilience Team will continue to operate from the Civic Offices and will therefore be central to the Epping Forest district.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation in progress with community partners. Community partners have shown interest in progressing a community hub; however they will not relocate to the Civic Offices unless their lease costs and conditions are comparable to those already in place at their current location.

Background Papers:

Accommodation Review papers.

Risk Management:

There is a risk that we will miss the opportunity to realise the benefit of establishing a community hub if this project is purely established with the model of relocating services. Further to that there is also the risk that we may miss the opportunity to meet the needs of our customers with existing fragmented services.