

Report of the Assistant Director (Customer and Communities)

Community Hubs

Summary

1. This report presents information in support of a proposed scrutiny review of the roll out of the council's community hubs programme.

Background to Scrutiny Topic

2. The council's approach to the development of community hubs, as a vehicle for supporting and engaging with York's communities, was set out in a report to the Decision Session of the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities on 22 November 2019. The proposal drew upon the learning gained from the 4Community Growth York project, which had been designed primarily to promote financial inclusion through the development of community hubs at Sanderson Court Community House, Foxwood Community Centre, Red Tower and, through working with Tang Hall Big Local, at Tang Hall Community Centre.
3. The report proposed a roll-out that is community led and needs based rather than a one size fits all model. Nonetheless, some key principles were proposed for the roll-out:
 - i. **Place** - A successful community hub will be located in an area where there is a need for services in an accessible, safe space which is either already at the heart of community activity or has the potential to develop a positive identity within the local community. The venue will be community managed. The strategy must be community led, responding to the ambitions of the community, rather than focussing on finding solutions for particular buildings.
 - ii. **People** – The strategy must be co-produced in a partnership of resident volunteers and front line service providers building relationships and trust and encouraging active citizenship. The

hubs are about and growing social connections and relationships and connecting resources in new and productive ways: relationships, time, skills, gifts, etc.

- iii. **Purpose** - The established community hubs have been developed in response to particular local needs, for example connecting people to financial inclusion support. A clear initial purpose galvanises activity and motivates people to volunteer and engage. A common theme has been a basic food offer on a free or pay-as-you-feel basis including cooked meals and 'food shops' utilising food donated by supermarkets. The benefits of this being three fold, forming part of the welcome offer, helping household finances go further and creating a social setting where people can relax, feel supported by peers and the wider community.
4. A dual approach to roll-out was proposed with a universal strand designed to support all communities in the development of their community facilities, in addition to a more targeted, developmental approach responding to identified areas of community need.
5. In the universal approach the Council will offer support to all community venues to develop their respective offers as community hubs. Support will be provided to assist community venues, where appropriate, to develop a range of offers to their local communities. Examples may include:
 - i. Maintaining good information and signposting e.g. a presence on and an understanding of how to use *Live Well York*
 - ii. Practical support in managing a safe and welcoming community venue:
 - A focus on health and safety and developing good working practises
 - Training packages to develop volunteers skills and knowledge e.g. food hygiene
 - Support in marketing and promotion e.g. website/social media campaigns
 - Building maintenance and contracts
 - Governance of the volunteer management committee
 - Understanding funding and money management
 - Customer insight

6. A “Good Place Network” will also be developed for York and all community venues will be invited to join. Feedback from practitioners and volunteers involved in the community hubs supports this as a way forward and there is the opportunity here to build on the established and well respected Community Centres Network. It will be led by the sector with support from the Council. It will offer community hub partners tools to set up, develop and maintain their projects as volunteers together with opportunities for peer support and sharing best practice. It is proposed to support the “Good Place Network” in developing a York Community Hubs accreditation scheme.
7. The development offer will be city-wide but will prioritise work in the communities facing the greatest challenges utilising the following checklist:
 - Evidence of need/community challenge can include but is not limited to:
 - Food Poverty
 - Child Poverty
 - Support for families/early help
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Enterprise and Access to work
 - Skills development
 - Equality of access to services
 - Identification of a suitable venue
 - Existence of or potential for the development of a community group or organisation willing to take on the management of a community hub
 - Potential for sustainability

The Pandemic

8. The pandemic has, of course, cut right across the implementation of this programme. In response to the pandemic the council has operated a network of five virtual hubs (Tang Hall, York Travellers Trust Clifton, Foxwood Community Centre, Clements Hall and Haxby Memorial Hall) managed by up to 10 CYC staff per day and supported by a body of dedicated “hub volunteers”. Working with a wide range of community partners and building new, local relationships, these virtual hubs have responded to a diverse range of individual and community needs since March 2020. They are now principally concerned with:

- i. supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) and others who were referred for support in earlier lockdowns and those required to self-isolate
 - ii. developing proactive community schemes, for example around food to respond to local need
9. The virtual hubs have been recognised as a very successful response to the pandemic, for example by the recent peer review which described them as having “real impact”. However, they are not in line with the original vision for community led hubs and we now need a route map to take us back to that original vision whilst building on the learning and new relationships that we have gained from the experience of operating the virtual hubs.
10. Our intention will be to resume the roll out of physical hubs as soon as possible; however, physical hubs clearly cannot operate before July at the earliest and there is a danger of a hiatus in support for residents. It is clear that there are issues for individuals and communities around mental health and wellbeing caused by isolation, financial and other pressures associated with the pandemic and that these are exacerbated by the disruption to normal community support mechanisms. The virtual hubs will extended up to the end of July to support those self-isolating and this extended period provides us with an opportunity to take a transitional approach to supporting individuals and communities, moving away from crisis support and seeking to build resilient support networks. In this approach:
 - i. Community Hubs will work with ward teams in each ward to link existing community groups with those that have been formed in support of the Covid response. The aim will be to establish a network of trusted community groups to support residents, using ward budgets as appropriate to fill gaps in local provision.
 - ii. Hub managers are currently working to identify those who may benefit from engaging with a local hub longer-term and starting to interact with them by virtual means such as weekly wellbeing calls and socially distanced doorstep chats.
 - iii. The hubs commissioning budget will be used to commission provision from partners, primarily in the voluntary and community sector, to meet identified cross-city needs.
 - iv. As lockdown restrictions ease the hubs will start to build moving to the aim of having at least one community hub for each ward offering a physical meeting place for local people to come

together, and filling in the gaps between existing community venues.

- v. When residents have Council Tax or rent arrears this will be used as a trigger point for contact with hubs as it indicates potential longer term challenges. This will provide the main front door for residents in crisis.
- vi. Investment in benefits and financial advice capacity and the commissioning of Citizens Advice to provide outreach services in the hubs will further strengthen this approach.
- vii. Live Well York is surveying partners and citizens with regard to community provision available to address social isolation. We will support to ensure that provision can operate in a Covid-safe way. Community mapping is also being developed to provide residents with a visual representation of support and community offers available to them across each ward.

11. Once community venues and existing hubs are fully open we will be able to return to the original ambition for community-led hubs.

Resourcing

12. Supporting the roll-out of community hubs will be a core function of the Communities Team. In addition to this, the Executive allocated the following one-off resources to support the roll-out. (These resources have been re-profiled to reflect the additional periods of lock-down and the consequent extension of the virtual hubs).

	20/21	21/22	
Staffing to manage the hubs roll-out	£18k	£72k	Continuation of existing roles
Invest in benefits / financial advice capacity		£10k	
Funding for a Volunteer Centre (CVS)	£10k	£30k	
Commissioning of Citizens Advice York	£20k		To provide support to the hubs model
A commissioning fund to support hubs and provide cross-city		£70k	

activity in support of vulnerable people			
TOTAL	£48k	£182k	£230k

13. There is also potential for ward members to use ward budgets in support of community hubs including the ward Covid-19 recovery fund (see report to the 2 February Decision Session of the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities attached as Annex A).

Other types of hub

14. Over and above the general community hub approach outlined here, more tailored approaches are also being pursued to meet the specific needs of particular communities. An example of this is the York Migrant Hub where we have recruited volunteers from migrant communities who are working together to open a new outreach service. The hub will become a Saturday community hub for migrants with sessions run in partnership with York Explore and a cohort of York St John University Law Students and volunteer community interpreters. Another example is the Community Covenant project which has established hubs for the armed forces community and has recently attracted funding to set up breakfast clubs.

Proposed Scope of Review

15. Since the roll-out of community hubs is not based on a one-size-fits-all approach but rather aims to respond to local need, important questions arise about how ward members will engage with their communities to understand need and respond accordingly. Potential review objectives would be to:
- i. Gain an understanding of national best practice and methodology in supporting community hubs and make recommendations for how this might be applied in York
 - ii. Establish the various:
 - different types and models of community hub that exist nationally
 - the various governance models that are available for hubs

and make recommendations with regard to their potential application in York

- iii. Make recommendations for how ward members can best engage with / support their communities in:
 - assessing and evidencing local need
 - establishing community hubs
- iv. Develop model steps for developing community hubs which might include:
 - Understanding local need and demands
 - Establishing a mission and vision with the community
 - Stakeholder mapping, developing partnerships and building relationships
 - Developing objectives
 - Developing a sustainable business plan
 - Securing assets
 - Establishing governance arrangements
- v. Develop proposals for how ward members could use ward budgets most effectively in support of hubs and complementing use of the hubs commissioning budget

Review Activities

16. Review activities could include:
 - i. Reviewing national guidance and best practice literature such as that produced by *Locality*, the national membership network supporting local community organisations
 - ii. Visiting existing York hubs and hearing from community leaders about the opportunities and challenges
 - iii. Visiting hubs of various kinds elsewhere in the country such as those established through the DCLG funded *Our Place* programme: the Ameina Centre in Luton, Soho / Victoria Friends & Neighbours in Smethwick, Levenshulme Inspire in Manchester
 - iv. Visiting other local authorities that have rolled out significant community hub programmes such as the London Borough of Brent
 - v. Looking at hubs models of different types such as:

- hubs in libraries as promoted by Arts Council England, see: [Libraries-CommunityHubs-Renaisi.pdf \(artscouncil.org.uk\)](#), or
- “Family Hubs”, see: [Home - The Family Hubs Network](#)

Timetable for review

17. Desktop activity can begin quite quickly once the immediate pressures on staff of dealing with organising the pandemic response begin to recede. However, it is very clear that the activities suggested above can only be conducted in a meaningful way once social distancing is ended and facilities are reopened. This would suggest scheduling the greater part of the review activity for the early Autumn.

Recommendations

18. Members are recommended to:
- Proceed with a review having considered and refined the remit as proposed in paragraph 15
 - Set up a Task Group to carry out the review on the Committee’s behalf
 - Agree a timeframe for completion of the review

Reason: To support the council’s development of its community hubs programme

Annex A: Ward Funding – report to the decision session of the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Communities, 2 February 2021

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**Report
Approved**



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Wards Affected:

All

