
Decision Session - Executive Member for
Economic Development and Community
Engagement (Deputy Leader)

3rd December 2015

Report of the Assistant Director (Communities, Culture and Public
Realm)

Investing in the Council's Community Centres

Summary

1. This report provides options, as requested by the executive member, for how best to use the £70k p.a. investment in the Council owned community centres, agreed by Council, in order to maximise local resident use of the centres and to help secure their financial sustainability.
2. This report also provides an update on Burton Stone Community Centre and seeks approval to commence a consultation process to understand residents' needs in Clifton.

Recommendations

3. The Executive Member is asked to:
 - Decide which option should be taken forward in how to use the £70k funding for community centres
 - Agree to commence a consultation programme to identify Clifton residents needs for future provision

Reason: To ensure community centres remain sustainable and provide local activity for residents.

Background

4. Since 2013, the City of York Council (CYC) decided to remove all direct funding to the five council owned community centres by reducing the budget to zero by 1st April 2015:
 - a. Burton Stone Community Centre
 - b. Tang Hall Community Centre

- c. Foxwood Community Centre
 - d. Bell Farm Social Hall
 - e. Sanderson Community House
5. The previous budget in 2013 was approximately £175k and was made up of: expenditure - staffing £109k, repairs and maintenance £62k, activity grants £32k, and income, mainly from Burton Stone Community Centre, - £28k.
 6. The voluntary management committees who manage the centres on behalf of the Council (excluding Burton Stone Community Centre, as this is directly managed by CYC) have been through a challenging couple of years with the knowledge that their funding was reducing. The challenge of becoming self-financing has focussed the management committees' work particularly on: detailed review of expenditure, finding new income streams, finding new volunteers to open and close the centres, attracting new funding, and changing governance structures.
 7. Over the last two years, officers have worked with each centre to review income and expenditure and to seek solutions that would allow each centre to operate without council funding from 1st April 2015. Each centre is now in a position where it can operate sustainably but the centres are managing with very tight budgets and further financial assistance is warranted to enable them to flourish and grow.
 8. A key part of the discussion with voluntary management committees has been to establish clear repairing liabilities for the buildings and grounds they are managing and to set this out in a lease. These negotiations are almost complete and it is anticipated that short term leases will be in place by the end of 2015.
 9. A Community Centre Network has been established to bring together volunteers and trustees who operate Council and non Council owned community centres to share best practice and ideas, as well as bringing in guest speakers on topics chosen by the network. Themes over the last year have included: advice on governance models, financial planning, fire safety, community hall technology, supporting different communities (e.g. students and military families) as well as showcasing activities at different centres.
 10. With respect to Burton Stone Community Centre it has particular issues in that there is no community involvement and it remains the only Council run staffed facility (with two part-time employees). The

plan approved by Cabinet in December 2014 to refurbish the premises and secure a new operator has not been successful, which leaves the centre without a long-term vision.

11. Burton Stone Community Centre will, in the short-term, remain in the control of the Council; however, the building is not fit for purpose and the latest condition survey demonstrates that this 1940s building with its 1960s extension is in need of major investment if it is to continue in use.

Consultation

12. In relation to the new £70k budget, formal consultation has taken place with volunteers and trustees who are running the centres and are best placed to understand how this new funding can support their plans going forward. This feedback has helped shape the options set out below.

Options

13. The Council recognises the important role that community centres play and the impact they can have on local residents' lives. To enable community centres to thrive and grow, a £70k budget has been provided. The principal options for how this investment might be used are:
 - a. The Council could retain the £70k budget with no direct grant funding to the voluntary management committees. The budget would be used to maintain the condition of the five premises enabling funds to be directed to those buildings which have the greatest identified repair and maintenance requirements.
 - b. The Council could split the £70k equally across the five centres, offering them a £14k direct grant each.
 - c. A combination of options A and B to provide some direct grants, whilst retaining some of the budget for the Council to contribute to the repair and maintenance liabilities. A sinking fund would also be established to allow a planned approach to asset replacement.

Analysis

14. Option a) would focus only on the physical asset, using the budget to address planned and reactive maintenance issues. In the consultation the voluntary management committees expressed the view that this option was too restrictive and did not support potential measures to improve the future revenue sustainability of each centre.

15. Option b) would focus on devolving budgets to the voluntary management committees for them to decide how best to use the £14k. This would be administered through a service level agreement with high level outcomes based around delivering on the needs of local residents. Devolving all the funding in this way would be dependent upon the centres taking on full repairing leases. It is unlikely that each centre would want to take on this liability and it would therefore be necessary for the Council to retain some funding to cover this liability.
16. Option c), provides a balanced approach by allowing the Council to hold back some funding to help address maintenance liabilities under the terms of the leases that are likely to be agreed, whilst providing a direct grant to enable each voluntary management committee an opportunity to improve outcomes for local residents. Consultation feedback also demonstrated an interest in the development of an apprentice role that could be managed by the Council to support the development of city wide community centre initiatives. Table 1 demonstrates how the budget could be split.

Table 1	CYC fund for reactive repairs	CYC Sinking Fund	Direct Grant	CYC apprentice	Total benefit to each centre
Description					
Bell Farm Social Hall	3,000	5,000	4,000	2,000	14,000
Foxwood CC	3,000	5,000	4,000	2,000	14,000
Tang Hall CC	3,000	5,000	4,000	2,000	14,000
Burton Stone CC	3,000	5,000	4,000	2,000	14,000
Sanderson House	3,000	5,000	4,000	2,000	14,000
	15,000	25,000	20,000	10,000	70,000

Options with regard to Burton Stone Community Centre

17. Before developing detailed options for Burton Stone Community Centre it is proposed that an exercise should first be carried out to identify what the future need for a community centre provision is in Clifton. It is proposed to carry out a consultation and engagement programme to speak to Clifton residents and users of the centre during Spring 2016 with feedback being provided subsequently to the executive member with recommendations for taking the next step.

Implications

18. Financial Implications:

19. The £70k budget available for 2015/16 has part been spent on essential maintenance work, condition surveys and therefore any grants will need to be based on a pro-rata basis.
20. The direct grants to the voluntary management committee's as described in option b and c, would need to be administered using a service level agreement (SLA) to ensure measured outcomes are delivered and reported back to the Council. The SLA measurements will include a focus on developing growth in; community use, identifying local residents needs, reducing annual overheads, delivering on health, adult social care or other priorities identified in the ward profiles and also the maintenance of the community centre buildings.
21. Option C describes a sinking fund of £25k per year, which would need to be ring fenced and allowed to be rolled forward each year to enable the fund to service the asset replacement programme, as identified by a building condition survey.

22. Property implications:

23. Building condition surveys have been commissioned on each building to assess the Council's financial liability over the next 20 years. The reports will not be available in time therefore the £5k pa is an estimated cost.
24. Option A will provide the best solution in terms of long term asset management as it will enable funds to be directed to those buildings which have the greatest requirement for repair and maintenance. Option C provides a smaller budget for the Council to contribute to its repairing liabilities although, once the results of the condition surveys are known there may be a need for further funding in order that the Council can meet its Health and Safety responsibilities.
25. **Equalities:** An initial EIA screening shows no equality impacts from these proposals.
26. The report has no additional implications relating to: Human Resources, Legal, Crime and Disorder, Information Technology.

Corporate Priorities

27. The proposals in this report are in line with the Council Plan priority to Place a Focus on Frontline Services.

Risk Management

28. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified associated with the proposals contained in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives and to deliver services, leading to damage to the Council's reputation and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations. The level of risk is assessed as "Very Low". This means that periodic monitoring is required of the operation of the new arrangements.

Annexes: None

Contact Details

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Report Approved



17/11/15

Wards Affected: Westfield, Dringhouses & Woodthorpe, Clifton and Heworth

All



For further information please contact the author of the report.

Background Papers:

16/12/14 – Report of the Cabinet Member for health and community engagement: [Development of a Specialist Activity Base for Adults with a Learning Disability and/or Autism alongside a Community Hub at Burton Stone Community Centre](#)