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| Committee: | Executive | Agenda Item No.: | 9. |
| Date: | 8 th April 2013 | Status | Open |
| Category | Decision within the functions of Executive | | |
| Subject: | Neighbourhood Management Community Houses | | |
| Report by: | Director of Health and Wellbeing | | |
| Other Officers Involved | Environmental Health Manager (Housing and Pollution) Neighbourhood Management Project Workers | | |
| Director | Director of Health and Wellbeing | | |
| Relevant Portfolio Holder | Councillor A. Tomlinson, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration | | |

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

COMMUNITY SAFETY – Ensuring that communities are safe and secure
CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES – Providing excellent customer focused services
ENVIRONMENT – Promoting and enhancing a clear and sustainable environment
REGENERATION – Developing healthy, prosperous and sustainable communities
SOCIAL INCLUSION – Promoting fairness, equality and lifelong learning.

Due to the holistic nature of Neighbourhood Management the service contributes to all of the above corporate aims.

VALUE FOR MONEY

The proposals in the report, aim to reduce costs by delivering services by an outreach approach and therefore avoiding the ongoing costs incurred from the three existing premises.

THE REPORT

Following the recent decision to close the Community Houses, officers have been gathering information to seek alternative funding or effectively plan for their closure if alternative funding was not forthcoming. An important part of transition was to maintain elements of support for those communities affected following any closures.

The issues faced differ between the three community houses and so each house is approached in turn. It should also be noted that the outline costs for each house are outlined in appendix 1.

South Normanton

Current use

The organisations currently using the South Normanton Community House are the Residents' Group, the Police and North Derbyshire Women's Aid.

Funding and alternative arrangements

Funding to sustain the Community House has not been forthcoming for the property. Alternative accommodation has already been found for the Residents' Group at The Hub. They are eligible for a reduced rent and are receiving financial support from Derbyshire County Council for the coming financial year due to their Community Group status.

The Domestic Violence Worker uses the Community House for confidential appointments with their clients. We understand that the project is not able to pay for the use of any accommodation and on average they use the premises for approximately 2 hours per week. It is therefore proposed that they are allowed to book the District Council interview rooms at The Hub, in order to ensure that vulnerable residents can continue to receive this service unaffected.

The Police already have alternative accommodation at the Hub and will be using these premises. Following discussions with the Police, they have indicated that they could vacate the premises at relatively short notice. It is therefore proposed to give 2 months Notice. However it should be noted that the Police occupy the premises on an informal basis and formal Notice is therefore not necessary. The Police will continue to work with the Residents' Group and as they will also be based at the Hub, they will both continue to work from the same location.

Closedown preparation

A date for the Residents' Group to move into their new premises at The Hub is not yet confirmed, but it is anticipated that this will be from the beginning of the new financial year. The Residents' Group owns a considerable amount of equipment for sports and general events and there is not sufficient space for all of this to be stored at The Hub. Additional storage facilities are therefore being explored at the Post Mill Centre as this would be an ideal location.

Considerable work is necessary to empty the premises and it will also be necessary to undertake conversion work, to bring the property back to a residential standard, before it can be returned to the Housing Department. It will also be necessary to apply for Planning Permission for Change of Use back to residential premises.

The Brunch Clubs in South Normanton and Pinxton are delivered in partnership with the Residents Association and equipment used at the Brunch Clubs can be accommodated at The Hub. Neighbourhood Management will therefore continue to deliver this work in partnership with the Residents'

Group. The Brunch Clubs currently deliver the majority of the customer engagements for the South Normanton Community House services and it is therefore important to continue this work.

Closure/transfer

Considering the points above and that the service provision is relatively unaffected, it is proposed that we plan the closure of the premises within the next two months.

Despite the expenditure incurred in bringing the premises back to residential use, once the property is occupied it will contribute to the New Homes Bonus received by the Authority. This is in the region of £6,000 over the next 6 years*. In addition to this, once the property is returned to the Housing Department it will be let for an annual rent of £3,972 and will add to the short supply of affordable homes within the District.

Castle Estate

Current use

The only organisation currently using the Castle Estate Community House is the Residents Association. They use the premises to store their equipment, hold their monthly meetings and host events and activities during school holidays.

Funding and alternative arrangements

Local members have been supporting The Residents' Group, by approaching the Town Council and the owner of the property (Villagate) on their behalf, to seek potential ways for them to take over the management of the premises. This has resulted in Bolsover Town Council making a pledge of £1,000 to the Residents' Group, as a contribution towards the running costs for the year 2013/14. Villagate have confirmed that they are willing to allow three months free rental (until the end of June) to allow the Residents' Group more time to obtain funding that may allow them to take over the tenancy of the premises.

Grant funding has been explored, however, there are very limited opportunities, as much of the funding available is capital funding rather than revenue funding. Capital funding by its nature is focussed around the delivery of new projects and is not suitable for covering ongoing expenditure. From discussions with the Residents' Group, it is clear that they too have experienced this problem and are doubtful about the prospects of obtaining funding for ongoing revenue requirements to sustain the facility.

Enquiries have also been made to the County Councillor to request support for the Residents' Group, similar to that offered in South Normanton, but this was unsuccessful due to having no funding available.

An Officer attended a recent Residents' Group meeting, where the potential to take over the tenancy of the House was discussed. It was clear that whilst the

*Note that New Homes Bonus is calculated as a net figure across the District

group felt that the Community House was a valuable asset to the community, they would not be able to take over the tenancy or running costs of the premises, due to the level of costs, limited availability of funding and the necessity to staff the premises.

The most immediate problem for the Residents' Group upon closure of the premises is their storage requirements. We are therefore exploring if there are any local facilities available and the Parish Council are currently considering if they are able to assist with this .

Closedown preparation

Villagate's offer of three months free rental is conditional upon the tenancy remaining with the District Council and the contractual obligation to convert the property back to a residential standard being honoured. As the Residents' Group have advised that they will not be able to take over the tenancy, then the conversion works can now be planned.

As with the South Normanton Community House, it will be necessary to apply for Planning Permission for Change of Use to residential and we would not be able to return the property to the Landlord until Planning Permission is granted. The target time for determining an application is 8 weeks and time also needs to be allowed for planning and completion of the conversion works. When the Castle Estate Community House is closed and returned to the landlord as residential premises, it is likely that the property will be brought back into use therefore attracting New Homes Bonus of around £6,000 over 6 years.

Over the past year no services have been run out of the community house on the castle estate. If staff are no longer tied to premises following this process, it is intended that support for the Residents' Group can be reinstated, therefore improving the service they currently receive.

Closure

As no alternative arrangements have been found to cover the running costs and keep the premises open, preparations can now be made for closure. The Residents' Group require more time to remove their equipment and the conversion works now need to be planned and completed. It is therefore proposed to close the Community House within the next month and to complete conversion works in preparation for handover within the 3 month period set by Villagate.

New Houghton

Current use

Unlike the other two Community Houses, there is no longer an active Residents' Group within New Houghton and so no community led events are delivered from these premises. However, limited services are delivered by partner organisations from these premises. These services are predominantly

provided by a variety of services at Derbyshire County Council and include Children's Centre activities, adult education and multi agency team meetings.

Alternative arrangements

As there is no active Residents' Group within New Houghton, there is no opportunity for the local community to take over the Community House.

Derbyshire County Council are the main users and have been advised of the potential closure of the premises. They are currently considering the impact on their services and whether they would be willing to consider renting the premises in order to continue their services from this location, or whether they could explore alternative venues.

Early indications suggest that rental of the premises may not be possible but we are awaiting a formal response. Whilst many of the projects may be able to contribute by an hourly rental rate, such contributions would not be sufficient to cover the running costs of the premises and so the only way of retaining the facility would be for DCC to take over a tenancy of the premises.

Closedown preparations

A regular and well established activity at New Houghton is 'Stay and Play'. This group provides support to local mums and promotes engagement and development of young children. There is a clear demand for this service and we are therefore exploring the potential to continue this service at the local Community Centre.

It is also proposed to develop a chair based exercise class, similar to the Brunch Clubs in South Normanton, which would assist in the prevention of slips trips and falls, as well as help engage with vulnerable residents.

Due to the size and facilities of the New Houghton premises, there is a considerable amount of equipment and contents, which can be stored at Pleasley Vale.

Previous work by the Residents' Group means that they own many items within the house, such as play equipment and a photocopier. If the equipment cannot be returned to the Residents' Group (as they are no longer active), then it will be offered to other groups and partners for the benefit of the local community. Alternatively it will be sold and the proceeds returned to the community.

As it will take considerably more time to clear this premise it is proposed that this is the last of the three to be closed, should it be necessary to close all three.

As the Council is the owner of the New Houghton premises, its future use needs to be determined. The Development Directorate have been advised of the potential closure of the premises, subject to alternative arrangements being found, to give consideration to its future and potential uses are being explored.

If the premises were closed and vacated, a 3 month exemption period would apply for business rates leading to a further saving of £1,000. However, following the 3 month exemption, full business rates will be due for these premises.

If no funding is brought forward within the next few weeks, then it is proposed to close the facility within the next 3 months.

Further developing the Neighbourhood Outreach service

Should all three Community Houses be closed, staff resources will no longer be tied to the Community Houses. These resources can be focussed on the three locations where houses were provided to allow for a soft transition within these communities. It will also present new opportunities across the District, where need is identified.

It is proposed that the service will operate using an outreach approach, particularly supporting those areas where Community Houses were located, to maintain or in some cases enhance service delivery. The outreach approach will help to engage with vulnerable people who would never previously have had access to the services run from the Community Houses and this will increase the number of vulnerable people that it can assist. The vision of the new service is to be more flexible and deliver more across the District and at present, it is envisaged that the focus of the service will be working with communities on the impacts of welfare reform and to contribute to the challenging issues still posed by the Public Health Agenda within the district.

Over the next few months, to help shape the future of the service, it will be necessary to consult with internal departments, customers, partners and members. The service will need to work in partnership with Public Health colleagues, Environmental Health, Revenues and Leisure to name a few. It is proposed that we will consult with members and customers (via the citizen's panel) to help inform the development of the service.

In order to better understand the distribution of need across the District, we will analyse data from a new system called MOSAIC, which has the capacity to identify the location of target groups, such as high levels of deprivation and disabilities for example.

The draft Equality Impact Assessment is attached as appendix 2 to this report. This assessment has identified that the outreach approach will minimise discrimination against minority groups, as it will no longer rely on customers accessing the services via a premises or from a distinct community.

The services provided from the Community Houses have always been at nil charge, despite the potential for charging. Consideration will therefore be given to the future service and where it may be appropriate to implement

charging, for example a nominal charge of £2 for Brunch clubs. Such charges may assist with room rental costs and allow a more sustainable service serving more communities.

As the service will operate by an outreach approach, it will be necessary for the officers to operate as flexible workers. Two of the three officers will therefore require laptops in order for them to operate as flexible workers. It is proposed that this investment should be funded via transitional funding.

ISSUES/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

In essence no sustainable funding options have been brought forward for any of the community houses and many of the facilities are continuing within those communities.

Alternative arrangements are in place in preparation for the closure of the South Normanton Community House and closure could be facilitated within two months.

The Residents' Group are not able to take over the running costs of the Castle Estate Community House. It is therefore proposed to close the Community House within the next month and to complete conversion works in preparation for handover within the 3 month period set by Villagate.

The outcome of consultations with Derbyshire County Council about the New Houghton Community House are yet to be determined. However, if no funding is brought forward within the next few weeks, then it is proposed to close the facility within the next 3 months.

Conversion works will be necessary at South Normanton and Castle Estate Community Houses. Inspections have been completed to schedule the necessary works and detailed costs are yet to be determined. However, it is anticipated that the costs will be in the region of £10,000 to £12,000 (including Planning fees) for both of the premises. It is proposed that these works are funded via transitional funding (Efficiency Grant).

As the new service will operate an outreach approach and will no longer be working from the Community Houses, the officers will need to 'flexible workers'. Two of the Project Workers will therefore require laptop computers and it is proposed to fund this requirement via transitional funding (Efficiency Grant).

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: There are costs incurred to close and convert the premises, but the closure does bring about long term savings.

Legal: None

Human Resources: As the Outreach Service is developed, it may be necessary to review the current job descriptions and this could require the post to be re-evaluated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The report be received and progress on the development of the Neighbourhood Outreach Service be reported to Executive in June.**
- 2. To close the South Normanton Community House within 2 months.**
- 3. To close the New Houghton Community House within 3 months subject to alternative funding not being forthcoming.**
- 4. To close the Castle Estate Community House within the next month. To undertake the necessary conversion works in preparation for handover within the 3 month period set by Villagate and to terminate the tenancy agreement.**
- 5. To fund the costs of Planning Applications and necessary conversion works via Transitional Funding.**
- 6. To provide laptops for project workers and fund this provision via Transitional Funding.**

REASON FOR DECISION TO BE GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION

To effectively plan for the closure of the Community Houses and to develop a future outreach service.

ATTACHMENTS: **Y**
FILE REFERENCE:
SOURCE DOCUMENT:

APPENDIX 1 - Property related costs for each Community House

2011/12 - Full Year costs

| | South Normanton | New Houghton | Castle Estate | Code total |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| G010/4004 Stores | 113.00 | 113.00 | 113.00 | 339.00 |
| G010/2014 Electricity | 910.61 | 246.70 | 284.45 | 1,441.76 |
| G010/2016 Gas | 405.29 | 1,588.73 | 163.49 | 2,157.51 |
| G010/2019 Business Rates | 1,071.67 | 3,853.70 | 1,558.80 | 6,484.17 |
| G010/2021 Water Rates | 264.43 | 131.18 | 373.92 | 769.53 |
| G010/2029 Pre-planned Maintenance | 522.08 | 522.08 | 522.09 | 1,566.25 |
| G010/4039 Telephones | 400.84 | 736.37 | 437.53 | 1,574.75 |
| G010/5001 Rent | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4,800.00 | 4,800.00 |
| | 3,687.92 | 7,191.76 | 8,253.28 | £19,133 |

£307.33 per C/M £599.31 per C/M £687.77 per C/M