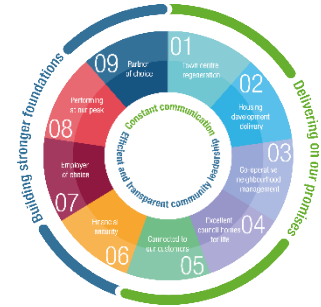


<b>Meeting</b>	Executive
<b>Portfolio Area</b>	Communities, Community Safety and Equalities Neighbourhoods and Co-operative Working
<b>Date</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> November 2018



## COMMUNITY CENTRE REVIEW – DIRECTION OF TRAVEL REPORT

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### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The report summarises the stage one review of council-owned community centres operating across Stevenage and recommends further community consultation and a co-operative agreement with existing community associations to develop a sustainable future model of community centre delivery.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive notes the outcome of the stage one review of community centres and the scope of options for potential future operational models
- 2.2 That the Executive agrees to undertake wider community consultation to vision the future community centre offer for Stevenage to meet our resident's needs.

- 2.3 That the Executive approves the implementation of a co-operative agreement with existing community associations in order to award delivery grants for 2019/20.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The review of community centres started in 2017, sponsored through the council's Co-operative Neighbourhood Management Programme.

This initial review built upon previous reviews undertaken in 2003 and 2008.

The review explored current operations across all sites and utilised Stevenage Community Association Network meetings to better understand some of the joint challenges and future opportunities. Community Associations were also invited to complete a questionnaire on current operations. This was combined with desk-based research via Companies House and the Charity Commission. Based on this feedback and direct engagement with Community Centres via the community development team strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were captured to help summarise the findings.

A list of community centres associated with current delivery models is attached in Appendix C

#### **3.2 Summary of Analysis**

The review clearly identified the need to ensure stronger less reliant community centres while improving the ability of centres to adapt and change to community needs in their neighbourhoods. The review highlighted the social value community associations bring to the town, and the importance of community centred delivery. The review also highlighted the potential reliance on more commercial activities as opposed to community functions in order to maintain income levels. The review gave clear consideration to the co-location of alcohol related venues on community centre sites and the need for community centres to be bastions of community health and wellbeing as well as community activities.

The review clearly identified the need to ensure more sustainable community centres, less reliant on council support whilst improving the ability of centres to adapt and change to meet community needs across neighbourhoods. The review gave clear consideration to the conflict between permanent bars within some centres and broader community, health and wellbeing objectives, particularly in relation to the commitments contained within the Healthy Stevenage Strategy.

The review also highlighted a lack of engagement and innovation across centres in involving young people in centre service design and delivery, often leading to young people feeling isolated in local community centre delivery.

The review highlighted some of the current innovation and good practice within community centres and associations, reflecting on the following themes from across the community centre estate:

1. There are good examples of where community coffee shops and cafes have been introduced to bolster income and provide informal meeting spaces to local community, increasing diversity, footfall and access to other groups and services
2. In some locations new community buildings or extensions supported by the council have provided associations with opportunities to reconfigure the community offer and provide a wider variety of engagement opportunities
3. Governance across some community associations has been strengthened by partnership working in areas such as GDPR, HR and finance
4. Several community centres have busy and vibrant programmes of activity led by the local community, this model enables the centres to fully understand and adapt to community needs

The review considered learning from elsewhere and explored existing delivery models, that may could considered in the Stevenage context;

1. Community hubs – as neighbourhood service delivery points for a range of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and public services, such as health care and housing support
  2. Community ownership – Community Asset Transfer of sites to individual groups
  3. VCS infrastructure – The development of an overarching trust for the management and operation of all community buildings
  4. Cooperative models – Partnership models between local authorities and community organisations to drive effective operational models and social dividend for local communities
- 3.3 As part of the review process a Policy Advisory Session was held with members chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Community Safety and Equalities.
- 3.4 The session highlighted the need to consult with the town's residents on their needs and aspirations for 21<sup>st</sup> century community buildings in Stevenage. This is deemed essential to set the vision.
- 3.5 The feedback reflected the need to develop a cooperative approach to engaging with existing community associations in the consultation and development of new models for community centre delivery and the need to address some of the operational challenges presented as part of this exercise.

- 3.6 The feedback highlighted the importance of community based buildings in Stevenage in achieving social cohesion, cultural development and access to specialist services, highlighting the commitment of Stevenage as a cooperative council in building stronger communities.
- 3.7 The Community Centre Review has focussed primarily on current governance and operations. This work informs the Locality Reviews as part of the Asset Management Strategy. Locality Reviews will help to determine a longer-term approach to the provision and management of council owned assets across the town. The reviews will inform the council's capital programme moving forwards.
- 3.8 The review created an opportunity to engage with the Cooperative Council Innovation Network in exploring potential models for Stevenage based on learning and delivery in other councils where changes to community centre delivery models have or are in the process of being made.

#### **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The review to date has highlighted the importance of engaging the broader population of Stevenage in establishing a vision for Community Centres of the future. A proposed consultation scope and timetable is provided in Appendix A.
- 4.2 The review has highlighted the need to work more co-operatively with Community Associations to develop a future operating model. A co-operative agreement will establish a partnership approach over the coming year. The council will formalise its support for community associations through Rent in Kind, a 2019/20 delivery grant and dedicated community development support. In return Community Associations will be asked to ensure good governance and legal compliance arrangements and to support broader community development and community wellbeing objectives. A proposed co-operative agreement is outlined as part of appendix B to this report. The co-operative compact partnership CCP will replace existing SCAN meetings with a more targeted, consultation and outcome based approach to future models.
- 4.3 The alternative of maintaining current arrangements is not being presented as an option as it does not help to address more immediate issues facing community centres outlined in section 3.1. The consequence may result in community associations not being able to meet governance and compliance requirements.

#### 4.4 Timetable for process

Review work area	Start date	Completion date
Cooperative Compact Partnership	January 2019	March 2020
Community Consultation	January 2019	March 2019
Final report	July 2019	September 2019

## 5 IMPLICATIONS

### Financial Implications

- 5.1 A provisional community centre grant allocation of £25,720.00 for 2019/20 was proposed as part of a tapered funding programme for Community Centre delivery in 2017. Individual community centre grant allocations linked to the proposed co-operative agreement maintain this overall grant figure. The council continues to pay compliance costs, repairs and maintenance costs in relation to Community Centres. The expenditure level in compliance and capital on community centres during 2017/18 stood at £57,600 compliance and £614,000 capital.
- 5.2 The council will continue to support community centres with compliance and maintenance costs throughout the review process. In spite of this ongoing support it is clear that some Community Associations have struggled to sustain their existing liabilities, including existing staffing arrangements. In some cases this has only been sustained through more commercial lets, such as day nurseries, social clubs or commercial bookings. Community Associations will need to continue to make decisions on current operating models over the coming 12 months to ensure good financial governance. In some cases they will need to make more fundamental decisions about their future form to remain viable.
- 5.3 A time-limited Project Officer role, funded by a successful bid to the Hertfordshire Pooled Business Rates Partnership will be introduced to lead public consultation and supporting the proposed cooperative agreement. This role will work closely with the council's Estates team as part of the Locality Review process.

### Legal Implications

- 5.4 Once an operating model for the delivery of Community Centres has been determined following consultation, lease arrangements will be reviewed and updated

- 5.5 The proposed co-operative agreement is a voluntary agreement and will form the basis of a grant conditions offer set out in the 2019/20 Community Centre Delivery Grant allocation.

### **Risk Implications**

- 5.6 Community centres facing high risks in financial sustainability will continue to be supported with advice and guidance on how to mitigate against some of those risks. In circumstances where community associations decide to cease operations the council will explore alternative options to protect and support community uses in the same or alternative neighbourhood venues.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.7 Equality and diversity in relation to community centre delivery and operations formed a central platform of the initial review process. The council is committed to ensuring community buildings and assets further community cohesion and building stronger communities across the town. Equality and diversity will therefore have a central role in both the proposed community consultation and the development of a co-operative agreement. A future operating model will give due consideration to how community centres will also serve the following protected characteristic groupings, by being safe, equitable and welcoming environments.

- Age
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender Identity
- Race
- Maternity and Paternity
- Disability
- Religion and Belief

In addition a future operating model will also give consideration to the provision of community buildings and socio-economic needs, ensuring that the community offer from the council's community buildings is accessible regardless of socio-economic circumstances.

### **Service Delivery Implications**

- 5.8 Service delivery implications have been considered. The proposed co-operative agreement has been developed as an enabling mechanism to form a future working partnership between the council and community associations. Where an operating model currently conflicts with the agreement, community associations will need to determine how best to respond to this to meet their overall mission and objectives.

Given the financial resilience of some community associations it is clear that some areas of service delivery might be at risk for more profitable commercial activities. Through the co-operative agreement the council will offer support to community associations to explore other funding opportunities to sustain community work. At all times the council will work to protect and support community uses.

### **Safeguarding Children Implications**

- 5.9 Safeguarding implications will be fully assessed during consultation and cooperative compact development. The council will ensure consultation with children and young people follows national standards in ensuring safety and security for those involved. The impact of consultation results on potential safeguarding measures within community buildings will be fully reviewed in consultation and compact development.

### **Other Corporate Implications**

- 5.10 The Community Centre Review will also inform Locality Reviews as part of the council's agreed Asset Management Strategy. This will help to inform future works as part of the council's capital programme
- 5.11 The review also references the ambitions contained within the Healthy Stevenage strategy in ensuring the council delivers community wellbeing. The strategy references the wider social determinants of health that are more prevalent in Stevenage than other parts of Hertfordshire. These include binge drinking amongst adults, benefit claims as a consequence of alcoholism, obesity and diabetes levels. The co-operative agreement formalises this commitment in the proposed use of council-owned community assets.

## **APPENDICES**

- A Community consultation draft structure.
- B Cooperative Compact draft agreement.
- C List of community centres in scope.