

REPORT FOR: CABINET

Date of Meeting:	19 May 2011
Subject:	Review of Council Support Through Community Premises and Community Lettings
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Brendon Hills, Corporate Director Community and Environment
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Rekha Shah, Portfolio Holder for Community and Cultural Services
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	None

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out proposals to revise the way that Council support is provided to the voluntary and community sector through Community Premises and Community Lettings based on the results of consultation feedback.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to approve:

1. Delegation of authority to Corporate Director of Community and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community & Culture, to implement alternative accommodation options for voluntary

organisations based at Community Premises in line with the options 1 and 2 identified in this report.

2. That the Council's current Community Lettings service ceases from 31st August 2011 to enable direct bookings with schools for voluntary organisations for school hall hire.

Reason: (For recommendation)

To deliver support to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in a more cost efficient, equitable and transparent manner that better meets current requirements.

Section 2 – Report

2.1 Introductory paragraph

This report sets out proposals for revising the way the Council provides support to the VCS through Community Premises and community lettings. Community Premises (ground floor offices at 27 Northolt Road, South Harrow) offers accommodation support to 26 voluntary organisations through the provision of individual offices, desk space, meeting rooms or access to a business postal address. Community lettings offers a booking service for school hall hire with concessionary rates for approximately 45 VCS organisations. The proposals contained in this report aim to deliver these services in a more cost efficient, equitable and transparent manner.

2.2 Options considered

2.2.1 A consultation was undertaken in January 2011 that sought views on the way that the Council provides some of its support to the VCS through grants, community lettings and community premises. The results of this consultation supported the view that alternative options for the delivery of Community Premises and community lettings should be developed.

2.2.2 Options for Community Premises

Developments taking place across the Council, statutory partners and the VCS create an opportunity to take a more strategic approach to addressing accommodation needs to maximise the use of a number of buildings and increase access to support for VCS organisations, including some not currently supported. This approach could also facilitate the development of VCS consortia and opportunities for community management of buildings. This idea has been suggested in previous reviews including the Overview and Scrutiny report

(December 2008) and there are examples of where this has been successfully achieved in other areas eg. Ealing.

Option: Implement alternative accommodation solutions for organisations based at Community Premises.

Consultation results show that 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that organisations should contribute towards the cost of this provision. The cost to the Council of providing this facility is £105,000 per annum. A calculation could be made that distributes the annual running costs between the user groups, according to their usage and a rental charge applied accordingly.

The consultation results also showed that 75% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be alternate provision in the borough, such as a resource centre or drop-in venue, possibly run by organisations themselves. 76% also agreed or strongly agreed that larger VCS organisations in the borough should support small groups with access to office space and meeting rooms.

It is therefore recommended that Cabinet approves the delegation of authority to The Corporate Director Community and Environment in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community & Culture to implement alternative accommodation options for voluntary organisations based at Community Premises.

2.2.3 Options for Community Lettings

Consultation results indicated that 75% agreed or strongly agreed that organisations should be able to book directly with schools rather than the Council operating as an intermediary. Whilst there was strong support for the proposal, there was also some concern that the changes could result in increases to hire rates making them unaffordable for VCS groups. Community lettings users currently benefit from a 50% concession on hire charges and direct bookings will remove this concession.

Feedback from schools however, supported the option to move to direct bookings as this could lead to increased partnership working with community organisations. There was recognition that the current system is inefficient and that a locally administered system run by individual schools, or groups of schools working together, was a very positive way forward. Removing the Community Lettings service will enable schools to set their own hire rates, allowing for individual flexibility in response to the hire market. Schools will be provided with a hire charge guide to help inform their proposals. In addition, a directory of available venues for hire outside of school premises will be updated to enable community organisations to have a wider choice, particularly where schools may achieve Academy status and/or may not offer venue hire at community rates.

It is therefore recommended that the process for direct bookings is developed with schools with a proposed implementation date of 1st September 2011. This would ensure a smooth transition from existing arrangements that fits with current bookings and the school academic calendar.

2.3 Background

2.3.1 The Grants Advisory Panel recommended to the Portfolio Holder in September 2010 that the Council undertakes a consultation on Council support to the voluntary sector. This consultation included a review of Community Lettings and Community Premises to determine if the existing models are still fit for purpose and meeting the needs of the voluntary and community sector. The full results of the consultation were presented to the Grants Advisory Panel at their meeting of 2nd March 2011. The Panel noted the report and expressed concern that with a number of schools expressing interest in Academy status, this could have an impact on Community Lettings and the implications for voluntary organisations should be considered.

2.3.2 The consultation opened on the 2nd December 2010 and closed on the 28th January 2011. Information about the consultation was sent to approximately 600 voluntary and community sector organisations. 84 questionnaire responses were received by the closing date, approximately 49 VCS representatives attended consultation focus group meetings including meetings that were set up specifically for Community Premises user groups and community lettings user groups. A presentation was also provided to Headteachers and was attended by up to 60 school representatives.

2.4 Current situation

2.4.1 The Community Premises building has provided office accommodation, meeting room and drop-in facilities at no cost to VCS organisations since 1996. It was originally intended to support new and emerging groups to gain access to office accommodation. Organisations can apply for use of an individual office, designated desk or casual desk use, depending on the number of hours spent at the premises and individual groups needs. There is also the option for organisations to use the Community Premises as a postal address only. Currently 26 organisations benefit from this support.

2.4.2 Community lettings offers a booking service for community organisations, offering concessionary rates (50% of the full rate) for school premises and the Teachers' Centre. Currently 20 out of a potential 50 sites opt in to the community lettings system for approximately 45 voluntary and community groups. Some schools offer direct bookings outside of this service. Block bookings are taken once a year and current bookings have been taken up to the 31st August 2011.

2.4.3 In addition to the support provided through community lettings the consultation questionnaire sought views on what other support could be made available. 46% stated that Harrow Council should offer support by offering concessionary rates for certain Council venues eg. at off-peak times and 35% felt that the Council should offer support by providing a directory of venues on the Council website. In response to these results, the Council will also undertake to provide support with lettings by providing a directory of venues on the Council website.

2.5 Why a change is needed

2.5.1 In a difficult financial climate there is a pressing need to ensure that all Council budgets are used effectively to maximise the benefit achieved for local residents. Within this context it is important that the Council develops its relationship with the voluntary sector in a way that maximises its use of resources and enables the sector to become less dependent on traditional methods of support that are no longer financially viable. The Council's Third Sector Strategy sets out a framework to develop that relationship in a way that enables participation and builds the capacity of the third sector to deliver services alongside the statutory sector.

2.5.2 The proposed timetable for implementation of these changes takes in to account the need to support affected organisations to minimise the impact on their services.

Table 1: Proposed timetable for implementation of revisions to Community Premises

Date	Activity
8 th Feb	Consultation results shared with VCS representatives
23 rd Feb	Consultation results shared with Community Premises user groups
May (tbc)	Options discussed with Community Premises user groups
19 th May	Recommendations presented to Cabinet
Jun - Aug	Detailed development of accommodation options including workshop with VCS to identify opportunities for sharing office space and back office functions
Sep –Mar	Implementation of alternative accommodation options

Table 2: Proposed timetable for implementation of revisions to community lettings

Date	Activity
8 th Feb	Consultation results shared with VCS representatives
24 th Mar	Consultation results shared with schools
May (tbc)	Consultation results shared with Community Lettings user groups
19 th May	Recommendations presented to Cabinet
May	Community lettings user groups and schools notified of Cabinet decision
Jun – Aug	Support with implementing changes offered to schools
1 st Sep	Direct bookings start

2.6 Implications of the Recommendation

2.7 Staffing/workforce

The recommendations contained in this report will impact on two posts within the Community Development team. The staff affected by these changes will be consulted and the guidelines contained within the protocol for managing change will be followed.

2.8 Legal comments

2.8.1 The provision of Community Premises is managed through a Community Premises user agreement. Current agreements have been extended for six months to 30th September 2011. Some of the organisations based at Community Premises have been based there since 1996. The agreement (paragraph clause 4.1) states that the Council reserves the right at any time to require the Organisation to move to alternative accommodation. The agreements do not give any organisation exclusive possession of any part of the Council's premises

2.8.2 Community lettings bookings are managed through the Hirers agreement. The agreement applies to one booking and does not confer any expectation that the Hirer has any rights other than those referred to in the Hirers agreement.

2.9 Financial Implications

2.9.1 If alternative ways of providing accommodation support for VCS organisations at Community Premises is developed this could deliver full year savings of £105,000. Due to the proposed timescale for implementing these changes only partial savings could be achieved in 2011/12 of approximately £26,000. Efficiency savings have been identified as £65,000 in 2011/12 and £45,000 in 2012/13. However, the proposal will produce the full year savings by the end of 2012/13.

2.9.2 If the Council ceases the operation of community lettings as proposed in this report and organisations are able to make their bookings directly with schools this could deliver full year savings of £89k. The MTFs has phased the savings of £59k in 2011/12 and £30k in 2012/13. Due to the proposed timescales outlined in this report only partial savings of approximately £44,000 could be achieved this year.

2.10 Performance Issues

The development of VCS consortia and community management could support the delivery of the Council's priority action to increase community ownership of assets. Indicators will be developed to monitor the health of the Third Sector in Harrow to replace the outgoing National Indicator.

2.11 Environmental Impact

The potential to maximise use of Council buildings through better planning, allocation and management as well as better use of shared accommodation amongst VCS organisations could contribute to the

Council's corporate target reduction of 4% pa in energy consumption by reducing energy costs.

2.12 Risk Management Implications

Risk included on Directorate risk register? No
Separate risk register in place? Yes

A separate risk register has been developed as part of the project plan to implement the proposed changes. This will ensure that risks are monitored and managed throughout the project planning and implementation stages. A risk register will be developed for each of the options for Community Premises.

There is a small risk that the proposed implementation date for community lettings does not give schools sufficient time to plan and set charges, however the likelihood of this is minimal as many schools already operate direct bookings alongside community lettings. In addition support will be available from the Council to support schools in implementing the changes

2.13 Equalities implications

Was an Equality Impact Assessment carried out? Yes

2.13.1 An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken on the recommendations regarding Community Premises and community lettings. The impact assessment has identified a potentially differential impact on BME communities as many of the Community Premises and community lettings user groups serve BME communities.

2.13.2 50% of the respondents to the consultation questionnaire however, felt the proposed changes would not impact differently on one or more of the following groups; age, disability, race, gender identity, religion or belief or sexual orientation. The consultation responses offer a different perspective on the potential differential impact on equality groups. This will continue to be monitored throughout the implementation of the proposed changes

It is important that Cabinet has regard not only to the Equalities Impact Assessment but also to the statutory grounds in the light of all available material such as the consultation responses and press reports. The statutory grounds of the public sector equality duty are found at section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;*
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;*

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- (a) remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- (b) take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- (c) encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The relevant protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race,
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

2.14 Corporate Priorities

VCS organisations supported through the provision of community lettings and Community Premises deliver a range of services to local residents that support the Council's corporate priorities including:

- Keeping neighbourhoods clean, green and safe.
- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Kanta Hirani	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 20/4/11		
Name: Jessica Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 26/4/11		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Wayne Longshaw



on behalf of the
Divisional Director
Partnership,
Development and
Performance

Date: 20/4/11

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards



Divisional Director
(Environmental
Services)

Date: 20/4/11

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Kashmir Takhar, Head of Service Community Development, 020 8420 9331

Background Papers:

1. Report to Grants Advisory Panel, September 2010
<http://modern.gov:8080/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=60289&T=10>
2. Report to Grants Advisory Panel, 2nd March 2011
<http://modern.gov:8080/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=60292&T=10>

**Call-In Waived by the
Chairman of Overview
and Scrutiny
Committee**

NOT APPLICABLE

[Call-in Applies]