

**REPORT FOR: GRANTS ADVISORY  
PANEL**

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**Date of Meeting:** 30<sup>th</sup> July 2012

**Subject:** **INFORMATION REPORT –  
Update on Community Premises**

**Responsible Officer:** Paul Najsarek, Corporate Director  
Community Health and Well-Being

**Exempt:** No

**Enclosures:**  
Appendix 1: List of current users  
Appendix 2: List of CARRAMEA  
members

## **Section 1 – Summary**

This report sets out an update on proposals for the future management of Community Premises (for the purposes of this report the term 'Community Premises' refers specifically to the ground floor offices of Council owned premises located at 27 Northolt Road, South Harrow).

**FOR INFORMATION**

## Section 2 – Report

### 2.1 Introduction

The Community Premises building has provided office accommodation, meeting room and drop-in facilities at no cost to voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations since 1996. It was originally intended to support new and emerging groups to gain access to office accommodation. Organisations were able to 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 an option for organisations to use the Community Premises as a postal address only or make use of the meeting and counselling rooms. Currently 27 organisations benefit from this support (see Appendix 1, list of current users).

2.2 During 2011 Harrow Council undertook a consultation on the future provision of Council support to the Third Sector. This consultation included questions on the future provision of Community Premises. The results of the consultation survey showed that **65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that organisations should contribute towards the cost of this provision; the 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.**

2.3 Consultation with Community Premises user groups in December 2010 also indicated a strong interest by users that the groups themselves should manage the building. During this consultation interest was expressed by a number of organisations in providing community management of the facility and all user groups were encouraged to submit proposals to the Council.

2.4 In 2011 the Harrow Strategic Partnership (HSP) invited applications for funding for Local Area Agreement (LAA) reward funding. Two applications were submitted for funding to support Third Sector accommodation projects. Neither application was successful however the HSP set aside £60,000 of capital funding for an accommodation project and invited both applicants to resubmit proposals either as a combined or single application.

2.5. In August 2011 the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) invited applications for the Transforming Local Infrastructure fund. Harrow organisations were partners in a West London application that secured funds for projects to deliver; (1) Support to deliver public services (2) Support to improve organisational governance (3) Access to shared premises. Harrow Equalities Centre (HEC) the lead body in Harrow selected local delivery partners through a competitive application process.

2.6. CARRAMEA a consortium of 16 organisations based at Community Premises (a list of members is provided at Appendix 2) was successful

in securing funding from both funding sources described in 2.4 and 2.5 above;

- (1) £60,000 of capital funding secured from the HSP.
- (2) £50,000 of revenue funding secured as part of the West London Big Lottery Fund application.

## 2.7 Proposal for community management

As a result of their successful funding bids a proposal to provide management of Community Premises was received by the Council from CARRAMEA.

CARRAMEA was established in 1999 and is made up of a range of small organisations (with an income of less than £10,000 per annum) that serve mainly Black, Minority Ethnic (BME) and Refugee communities. CARRAMEA propose to use the funding that has been secured to install state-of-the-art IT equipment, undertake some refurbishment of the building and employ a centre Manager.

- 2.8 The proposal is to offer multi-use, flexible office and meeting room space available to hire at an affordable hourly rate. Each of the five multi-purpose rooms would be equipped with internet enabled computers and the layout for each room would make it available to hire in any one of the following ways;
- (i) individual hot desking space
  - (ii) hired as an entire office
  - (iii) hired as a meeting room

CARRAMEA's proposal also includes the provision of a full-time Centre Manager; opportunities for volunteers and job-seekers to be involved in the provision of reception services and general management of the building; a switchboard, message and post handling service, IT training room and state-of-the-art Apple Mac design suite for the production of publicity material.

- 2.9 Discussions are also underway with the Housing department about the potential to offer community management of the adjacent Community Hall. The potential to offer both sites for community management would offer an attractive package of community management that would enable CARRAMEA to ensure full occupancy of the community hall creating a vibrant hub for community activity.
- 2.10 Premises user groups have been consulted and are regularly updated on the proposals both by CARRAMEA and at meetings of user groups. The current Facilities Use Agreements have been extended to the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012.
- ## 2.11 Opportunities
- This proposal presents the Council with a number of opportunities as well as potential risks. The opportunities offered by this proposal include;

- An opportunity to develop this proposal so that it becomes a model for the Council's approach to other potential community management schemes, in line with the expectations of the Localism Act.
- An opportunity to enable a sense of wider community ownership of the building in this part of the borough;
- An opportunity to develop the capacity of this consortium of small groups and thereby signal the Council's support for local groups to work in consortiums.
- An opportunity to promote equality by demonstrating support for a consortium that mainly serves BME and Refugee communities.
- An opportunity to enable small organisations that have previously been largely dependent on Council support, to become self-sufficient and empowered to manage a Council-owned asset whilst also ensuring continued access to a resource that meets the needs of their service users.
- An opportunity for the Council to develop good practice and become one of the leading local authorities in this area.

Support for this proposal is also in line with the aims of the Third Sector Investment Plan and responds to the consultation feedback which showed support for the development of community hubs and community management. CARRAMEA's proposals would increase access to this facility beyond the current users and provide a modern, fit for purpose resource for Harrow's Third Sector.

#### 2.12 Risks

One of the main risks identified for this proposal is the long-term sustainability of the project which depends on several factors including;

- (i) CARRAMEA's ability to continue raising funds to support the running of the building;
- (ii) a viable business and marketing plan that generates sufficient income to cover running costs;
- (iii) capacity within the organisation to manage the project.

To mitigate against these risks and to support CARRAMEA, the interim CVS service has been providing advice and guidance. Specialist advice has also been provided by other charities such as the Ethical Property Foundation. Regular meetings have also been held between CARRAMEA and Council officers to monitor the development of the proposals. If the proposal is accepted by Harrow Council it will continue to monitor the project so that issues can be identified early and further support provided as necessary.

2.13 The transfer of management from the Council to CARRAMEA would be managed under a lease arrangement. Discussions are underway with both the Housing and Property departments to consider what the

length and terms of the lease could be. The lease would be developed in consultation with CARRAMEA, the relevant Portfolio Holders and other relevant stakeholders. The lease would include all necessary safeguards to ensure the return of the asset in a fit and proper condition to the Council at the end of the term or sooner if required by either party.

- 2.14 This property is part of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) therefore full market rent would be payable and the lease would need to reflect this requirement.

### **Section 3 – Further Information**

- 3.1 This proposal will require approval by the relevant Portfolio Holder/s. A further update report will be presented to the Grants Advisory Panel in November 2012.

### **Section 4 – Financial Implications**

- 4.1 In the current financial climate, the Council has to consider all spend carefully. Currently, the Council offers access to office space at Community Premises at no charge to any organisation. This proposal provides the opportunity to work with local community organisations to offer improved facilities, managed by and on behalf of the community, whilst reducing the financial burden on the Council.
- 4.2 Under these proposals CARRAMEA would take on all running and repair costs for this facility. Some continued financial support from the Council would be required to support the project in its initial stages. It is proposed that the Council would continue to pay the rental costs on a tapered basis over the first three years of the project on terms to be agreed, if this project proceeds. The annual rent costs are £18,750 and these would be managed within the Community and Culture budget.

### **Section 5 - Equalities implications**

- 5.1 CARRAMEA provided an equalities impact assessment of their proposals as part of their application for funding to the HSP. This assessment identified that the proposal offered many positive opportunities for equality groups, particularly those serving BME communities and no adverse impacts were identified. The Council would undertake its own Equalities Impact assessment before any decision to proceed with the transfer of management was undertaken.

### **Section 6 – Corporate Priorities**

- 6.1 Many of the organisations based at Community Premises provide projects and activities that support the following corporate priorities.
- 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.

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|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Name: Roger Hampson             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | on behalf of the<br>Chief Financial Officer |
| Date: 2 <sup>nd</sup> July 2012 |                                     |   |

## **Section 7 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

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

**Background Papers:** None