

Surrey Heath Borough Council
Executive
19th March 2024

Community Hub – Exploring Options

Portfolio Holder:	Housing and Inclusion Cllr Lisa Finan-Cooke
Strategic Director/Head of Service	Sally Kipping – Head of HR, Performance & Communications
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PH Sign off:	Yes
Key Decision:	No
Wards Affected:	All

Summary and purpose

To explore options for a Charity Hub within Camberley Town Centre.

Recommendation

The Executive is advised to RESOLVE that

- (i) The development of a Charity Hub in Camberley Town Centre be paused pending decision making about the future location of Surrey Heath Council offices and the delivery model that will be adopted following relocation; and
- (ii) As part of any future relocation of Council offices, further engagement with stakeholders takes place (including charity partners and their service users) prior to any decision by the Executive.

1. Background and Supporting Information

- 1.1 The 2023/24 annual plan includes an action to bring forward Charity Hub proposals, subject to funding being secured. This paper explores the options for this and the appetite of the current administration to pursue this given the current financial position of the Council.
- 1.2 The original vision of a charity hub was to provide shared space within the Town Centre for charities to work together and as a focal point for residents to gain advice and support, with a particular emphasis on older residents.

- 1.3 Enquiries have been made with potential voluntary sector partners. It has become clear that the potential interest has been driven by a project led by Surrey Heath Age Concern to expand the current premises and concept of the Rainbow Café in order to broaden services to older residents. This concept was developed in 2018 but has not as yet progressed partly due to the pandemic and partly due to funding considerations for this organisation.
- 1.4 Interest from other charities has not yet been identified, however further engagement is taking place including with revenue grant partners such as Citizen's Advice Surrey Heath (CASH), Age Concern, the Hope Hub, Camberley Job Club and Voluntary Services North Surrey (VSNS). Some charity partners have indicated that their clients prefer to have out of town locations whilst others have indicated that town centre space is preferred.
- 1.5 There are already Surrey Heath Borough Council owned properties within the town centre utilised by third sector partners. The Work Shop is also located within the town centre. Demand for office use/office facilities has reduced since the pandemic with the social shift in home working and the increase in confidence in using technology amongst residents.
- 1.6 Were a hub to be developed, it could offer leased office and meeting space for charities, and act as a support hub for residents enabling easy to access physical 'drop in' to third sector services.
- 1.7 There is vacant space available for the hub within the Square or Surrey Heath House. Were the Square to be utilised, there would be direct or indirect costs relating to either the cost of rent or the loss of a rental opportunity. Feedback from charities has indicated that whilst Surrey Heath House is an option, given its location just outside the heart of the town, it is less attractive as it is less likely to attract 'walk ins'.
- 1.8 Currently CASH and VSNS use space within Surrey Heath House. The Hope Hub have their own office space within their existing premises.
- 1.9 Surrey Heath House is likely to be developed in the next few years. It should be noted that there is no obligation on Surrey Heath Borough Council should they relocate to provide office space for partners, however the principle of co-location of public and voluntary services should be something to be explored further as part of the future relocation of the Council offices. The size and facilities of the hub will need to take into account requirements of these partners should the Council prefer to stay co-located.

2. Appetite for the Hub

Discussions with relevant groups have indicated that there is a very limited appetite for the creation of a separate charity hub separate to the consideration that would need to be given as part of the future relocation of the Council offices when that takes place in the future.

Surrey Heath Borough Council

- 2.1 Residents have an expectation that they can visit the Council Offices in person should they wish and this is facilitated by our current location which is accessible with good public transport links. There is also visitor parking available for 30 minutes. There is a reception and Customer Services are located on the ground floor making the facilitation of appointments relatively straight forward. Whilst services encourage appointments to enable more meaningful and in-depth engagement, drop-ins can also be facilitated for services such as Housing. This helps services to be accessible particularly for those who still find technology a barrier to resolving their needs.
- 2.2 Many public services have reduced face-to-face contact in line with reduced resident demand for this type of engagement following the pandemic, an equivalent increase in preference for telephone and email contact, and increasing use of new self-service options available on the Council's website, which are available 24/7. Maintaining all channels for service delivery will be important, particularly if some methods may be easier for some people to use who have particular needs, such as a lack of ready access to technology or due to specific disabilities. Therefore any future location of the Council offices, will need to accommodate a physical space for residents to be able to visit should they wish.

Third Sector Partners

- 2.3 CASH and VSNS have expressed an interest in remaining co-located with the Council.
- 2.4 Surrey Heath Age Concern have responded positively as part of their general vision for the future.
- 2.5 We are awaiting responses from other Revenue Grant holders who already have their own office arrangements. It should be noted that there is no obligation to co-locate. We are in the process of contacting other charities within the borough however demand so far has not been identified for a separate standalone hub.

Other Partners co-located at Surrey Heath House

- 2.6 Discussions with partners are at an early stage. These include the Police, Department of Work and Pensions, National Health Service, and Surrey County Council. This will affect the potential size, location and facilities of any central hub and would mean extending beyond a location specifically for voluntary sector groups.

3. Proposal and Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Executive has the option to:

- i) Ask officers to develop a costed option for a charity hub within the town centre using an existing unit in the square and bring this back to Executive.
- ii) Explore funding options for i) above.
- iii) Explore demand further with stakeholders including residents.
- iv) Instruct officers to pause development of the hub and to wait until a clearer picture is known around any potential move from Surrey Heath House.

4. Contribution to the Council's Strategy

4.1 Promote healthier and more inclusive communities

4.1.1 Having a hub that promotes face to face contact may promote better relationships with residents and ensure that charity services are more accessible. This includes the ambition to facilitate a flourishing voluntary sector and will support co-working and therefore better understanding between the Council and revenue grant holders.

4.1.2 The hub will support those in greatest need and be in a position within easy transport access. However it must be pointed out that it may not be accessible to residents who live away from the town centre and cannot easily access transport or technology.

4.2 Support a strong economy and create more homes:

4.2.1 The use of a unit within the Square will ensure that the Square continues to be a diverse and vibrant economic centre however there would be a cost element relating to the rental value of the unit.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 Funding for the hub will need to be identified and agreed.

5.2 Resources for the hub will be included in cost projections.

6. Section 151 Officer Comments:

6.1 There is no funding provided for in the current annual revenue or capital budgets. Once costs are known a business case will have to be made requesting a supplementary budget estimate from Executive/Council.

7. Legal and Governance Issues

7.1 No further matters arising.

8. Monitoring Officer Comments:

8.1 No further matters arising.

9. Other Considerations and Impacts

Environment and Climate Change

9.1 None arising.

Equalities and Human Rights

9.2 The proposed hub would be accessible and would provide a more joined up service for residents. However there is a concern that residents who cannot travel to the Town Centre would not be able to access the hub and might therefore feel marginalised.

Risk Management

9.3 None arising.

Community Engagement

9.4 Requires more stakeholder consultation including with residents to demonstrate the demand and cost/benefit of the hub.

Annexes none