

Agenda Item No:	6	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny	
Date:	7th September 2015	
Report Title:	Community House	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

- To consider:
 - The progress made towards delivering the outcomes set out in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Flexible Support Fund which is funding the costs of Community House for 2015/16.
 - Work that has taken place to try and secure external funding for Community House from April 16

2 Key issues

- Cabinet on the 18th September 2014 recommended commencing a community consultation on a proposal to close Community House and to provide services through alternative means.
- The consultation took place over a 12 week period between September 26th and December 19th 2014.
- Recognising the work undertaken by partners at Community House and also that the work undertaken by the Council at the house contributes to objectives of other public services, a consultation with partners was also undertaken over the same period to gather their views on the proposal and explore whether new funding could be secured.
- The consultation with both the community and partners showed strength of feeling for the work the house does.
- During this period a successful bid was submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver support services at Community House from April 2015 through their Flexible Support Fund.
- The Leader requested that Overview and Scrutiny looked at the process relating to the future of Community House
- The panel met on the 5th January 2015 to consider the results of the consultation process (minute OSC 25/14 refers)
- Alongside receiving the news of the successful bid to the DWP, the panel heard that there were potential funding streams emerging that could potentially support the type of Community Support service delivered at the house. However some of these funding streams will not become available until later in 2015/2016 and beyond.

- The panel therefore agreed with the reports proposal that whilst delivering this new support service it is proposed that the Council, with partners, should continue exploring a sustainable solution to the work of Community House from April 2016.
- Between January and the end of March 2015 an implementation plan was developed in order to be able to quickly start to deliver the new service from April 2015
- Monthly project & performance management meetings have taken place to ensure the referral process of DWP beneficiaries to the house is streamlined and effective both from the DWP and other referring agencies.
- The impact of the programme has been positively received by staff at DWP with 74 beneficiaries entering the programme between April and the 31st July 2015. Of the 13 beneficiaries that have concluded the programme all 13 feel more confident to seek work. The majority of the 74 are still receiving support and 7 have found work since being on the programme.
- The Job Centre team leader has stated “As you know we are really pleased with the enthusiasm and commitment shown by you all for this project. In three months of Joint Working between DWP and Fenland District Council, the new pilot at the Wisbech Community House has been delivering good outcomes for people on working age benefits and the distance travelled has been significant. There is clear evidence that people’s lives are being transformed through upskilling and confidence building”
- Work has been undertaken to look at funding from 2016/17.
- The DWP have informed the Council that although they are pleased with the project the Flexible Support Fund has been significantly reduced and they would not be able to fund the programme at all in 2016/17. However they have suggested the Council continues to check on the funding position in October 2015 and then December 2015
- A prospectus was distributed by the Council to 70+ partners that have been looking at the “Building Better Opportunities” European Social Fund (ESF)(Ran through the Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough Local Economic Partnership (GC&GP LEP)) bidding round which had a closing date of the 3rd August for expressions of interest. The prospectus emphasised the need for bidders to ensure the geography of Fenland was covered as part of their submission and how the Council could support them. The Community House programme of delivery with the DWP had close connection to the outcomes in one of the funding areas called “Barriers to Work North”. From this 2 lead partner organisations who are bidding to the funding stream asked for the Council to submit a proposal for the Community House service to be a support partner. If successful with either of these schemes the programme would run for 3 years from April 2016.
- We will not know the outcome from these 2 submissions until November 2015.
- In terms of other funding avenues, the Council is taking on a supportive role to help support development of a “Local Action Group” (LAG) led by Cambridgeshire ACRE to submit a Community Locally Led Development (CLLD) submission for Wisbech. The GC&GP LEP have identified the town of Wisbech and a part of Peterborough as being a qualifying area for a CLLD submission to secure £750,000 from the ESF for community based activities that bring local people in need closer to being able to take on a job. A further £750,000 of match funding has to be sourced. The call for expressions of interest is currently underway and the indication is that any funding (subject to being successful with the submission(s)) will not be available until April 2017. It is also 2 early to say whether or not the LAG partnership would consider the

work that Community House does with the DWP as an activity they would consider for funding.

- As a further risk Circle Housing Roddons (CHR) who own Community House and the Garden stated that although they would be happy to continue to allow the Council to have the facility rent free for 2015/16 (as they have done since the transfer of the housing stock from the Council to CHR in November 2007) they would not be able to guarantee this from April 2016. Early discussions have taken place on this with CHR looking at how the work has benefitted residents within their stock. These discussions will continue.
- Clearly the situation at the time of this report is that although there are potential avenues of funding being explored from 2016/17 there is no firm funding proposal on the table. Therefore the ongoing discussions will be fed into the Comprehensive Service Review that is underway to support the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy

3 Recommendations

- For Overview & Scrutiny to:
 - Note the positive impact the new service at Community House has had since April 2015 and the positive feedback from the DWP as funders of the project
 - Note the work that has been undertaken to look to secure alternative funding for the house from April 2016 with feedback on 2 funding submissions expected in November 2016
 - Note the outcome from the funding discussions will be fed into Comprehensive Service Review that the Council is undertaking.

Wards Affected	Waterlees and surrounding Wards in Wisbech.
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Mike Cornwell, Portfolio Holder for Communities, mcornwell@fenland.gov.uk , 07732 558290
Report Originator(s)	Dan Horn, Head of Housing & Community Support, dhorn@fenland.gov.uk , 01354 622470
Contact Officer(s)	Richard Cassidy, Corporate Director, richardcassidy@fenland.gov.uk , 01354 622300 Dan Horn, (details above)

**Background
Paper(s)**

Cabinet report, 18th September, 2014, “ Community Support Developing a Future Approach”,

<http://www.fenland.gov.uk/aksfenland/images/att5250.pdf>

Overview & Scrutiny report January 5th 2015 “Community House”

<http://www.fenland.gov.uk/egenda/kab12.pl?cmte=OSC&meet=92&arc=71>

Cabinet report “Community Support developing the future approach”

<http://www.fenland.gov.uk/aksfenland/images/att5446.pdf>

Report:

1 Background / introduction

- 1.1 On the 18th September Cabinet considered and agreed an approach to refocus the Community Support offer the Council delivers to the community (minute C22/14 refers).
- 1.2 The agreement was based on the need to deliver further efficiency savings whilst also recognising that a “peer review” by the Local Government Association (LGA) concluded that the Council was trying to do too much and needed to look at how it prioritised resources to make the biggest impact.
- 1.3 However in agreeing a revised programme of Community Support activity Cabinet also agreed that before a final decision is made, a 12 week consultation is undertaken on a proposal to close Community House. Cabinet also requested that Overview & Scrutiny reviewed the Community House proposed closure following the consultation period to help inform Cabinet’s final decision.
- 1.4 However a successful bid was submitted to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver support services at Community House from April 2015 through their Flexible Support Fund.
- 1.5 The submission detailed how the house resource could be used to help support DWP claimants to help them gain confidence to secure education, skills, training and employment. The submission of £48410 was successful to commence from April 15 for 1 year as a pilot project. DWP are using the fund to explore working with partners in different ways to support beneficiaries. The submission stated it would deliver:
 - A referral service directly from DWP beneficiaries to the house
 - The team will identify through a beneficiary support form the root causes of issues and to start taking practical steps to build confidence, address anxiety or perceived issues which prevent working.
 - The project would provide much needed coordination and organisation between local partners to ensure beneficiaries receive a more comprehensive personalised service.
 - The house FDC team will deliver a programme of “Community Based” activities to build confidence with beneficiaries to want to access a network of local partners offering further support using the informality of the house or nearby facilities
 - The types of support to be delivered on an individual , group or signposting basis:
 - Developing a CV
 - Writing a Job Application
 - Preparing for interviews
 - Using resources available from National Careers Service (NCS)
 - E-based learning using the computer suite
 - Signposting to address other areas of concern (non work related) that are impacting on the ability of the individual to address work e.g. use of Citizens Advice Bureau kiosk referrals to advocacy services, financial capability building or links to the Together with Families programme
 - Volunteering e.g. Gardening , IT or helping to deliver a house Community Event or an event at the Oasis
 - Confidence building and dealing with anxiety e.g. Cooking club & Life Skills
 - Confidence Courses (e.g Domestic abuse victims)

- Referrals to 3rd parties such as Norfolk & Waveney Enterprise Service (who work from the house), Volunteer Bureau who have a drop in at the house or the Credit Union.
 - Links to the SPICE timebanking initiative to improve CV
- 1.6 The panel met on the 5th January 2015 to consider the results of the consultation process (minute OSC 25/14 refers)
- 1.7 Alongside receiving the news of the successful bid to the DWP, the panel heard that there were potential funding streams emerging that could potentially support the type of Community Support service delivered at the house. However some of these funding streams will not become available until later in 2015/2016 and beyond.
- 1.8 The panel therefore agreed with the reports proposal that whilst delivering this new support service it is proposed that the Council, with partners, should continue exploring a sustainable solution to the work of Community House from April 2016.
- 1.9 The panel stated they would request an update on progress on the delivery of the new service and funding from 2016/17 in their work programme for 2015/16.

2 Considerations

- 2.1 A Community House Flexible Support Fund implementation plan for the new service in was undertaken between January 2015 and the end of March 2015. The work included:
- Training and Development of the Community House Team on developing individual support plans and understanding the regulatory work the DWP undertakes with beneficiaries.
 - Creation of referral processes and forms, both from the DWP and other partners
 - Development of performance management database and support forms to monitor the impact of the journey each individual takes to bring them closer to accessing work.
 - Building a “one team” working relationship with DWP and other partners to maximise the impact of the project

Community House Performance

- 2.2 Table A below shows the outcome targets agreed with DWP.

Table A – Community House outcome targets and progress year to date

Outcome	Target for 2015/16	Year to date April – 31 st July 2015
Number of participants	192	74 – including 14 who have not engaged in the programme despite repeated efforts
Number of residents supported to improve employability skills	115 (60%)	51 – currently 69%, 51 out of 74 based against target of 60%
Number of residents supported away from	48 (25%)	7 – currently 26%, 7 out of the 27 who have either concluded the programme

welfare into employment		or have not engaged against a target of 25%
Number of residents supported to access training	96 (50%)	33 – currently 45%, 33 out of 74 against target of 50%
Number of residents supported to access a voluntary opportunity	48 (25%)	17 – currently 23%, 17 out of 74 based against a target of 25%
Number of residents who feel more confident to seek work	144 (75%) of those asked at the end of the programme	13 – currently 100%, 13 out of 13 asked at the end of the support programme against a target of 75%

Red is greater than 10% deficit from target

Orange is between 5% and 10% deficit from target

Green is on target or above

Evidencing the impact

2.3 The impact of the project has seen support from wider business:

- 11 members of Lloyds Bank staff worked with other community volunteers to help prepare the Community Garden for 'In Bloom' assessment. Additionally, 7 people were assisted in developing their interview skills by the Lloyds Staff, and they will continue to provide employability skills advice at the Community House.
- The Community House has also had assistance from Delamore who have provided plants for the garden and have offered training workshops to people on the DWP project.

2.4 Examples of the work secured by beneficiaries on the scheme included employment at a processing factory and a manufacturing firm. The team have helped support employment through CV development and interview skills training

2.5 The Council have worked in partnership with Wisbech Community Development Trust to help deliver a confidence course which has given the beneficiaries enough confidence to be able to present themselves well at interview.

2.6 Volunteering opportunities have related to both Community House and the wider community. One volunteering opportunity has been the recruitment of people for Wisbech In Bloom, which has benefitted the community and given the beneficiaries a sense of pride for their Town. Community House's garden was inspected as part of the In Bloom judging assessment.

2.7 Example case studies:

- Mr A is a gentleman who has had 3 heart attacks and a stroke in the past 5 years, the stroke which he had last year has had an effect on his speech and memory. The team are having conversations with Mr A to help him improve his speech and he also attends the social events we have to help him improve speaking to other people.
- Mrs B has some qualifications but wants to refresh on some aspects including IT. The team have put her on the Learn My Way course and also worked with her on the National Careers Service website to help her with hints and tips on interviews. Mrs B is confident talking to people face to face but not so much on the phone so the team set up a few phone interviews to help her gain confidence talking over the phone.

- Mr X suffers with depression and has good weeks and bad weeks. He was referred to the learning library to gain a level 2 English qualification and is enjoying it. He said it helps him to have things to focus on. He also wanted to gain basic knowledge of Microsoft office software the team have placed him on the essential beginners guide to both Excel and Word for him to work through in the computer room at the house.
- Mr Q came to us with low confidence and low maths skills. His CV was reviewed and he is now a lot more confident with it, Mr Q is about to start at the Wisbech Learning Library to gain a level 2 Maths qualification and has volunteered for work at the house. Mr Q offered to help to support people to improve their IT.

2.8 Feedback from the beneficiaries

- Alongside the formal assessment to capture the performance against the targets set the team at Community House has also captured some quotes from the beneficiaries on the project at Social Groups that have been formed to help provide support for one another :
 - “The group is building my confidence”
 - “This is the first time in 11 months I have been in a group environment, it’s down to you guys taking the time to explain thoroughly what to expect – It’s a chance to feel normal”
 - “It’s great to make new friends, my confidence is growing and I learn new things”
 - “It gave me a reason to go out and this is the first time I have gone out without a family member”

- 2.9 The project team consisting of the Council, the DWP and CHR meet monthly to look at the project and agree actions to help improve the success of the project. The DWP have not had any issues with how the project has delivered. The Job Centre Leader provided this quote to support other funding submissions:

“As you know we are really pleased with the enthusiasm and commitment shown by you all for this project. In three months of Joint Working between DWP and Fenland District Council, the new pilot at the Wisbech Community House has been delivering good outcomes for people on working age benefits and the distance travelled has been significant. There is clear evidence that people’s lives are being transformed through upskilling and confidence building”

Securing funding from 2016/17

- 2.10 Alongside setting up and commencing delivery of the Flexible Support Fund project with DWP. The Council has also been exploring potential funding opportunities from April 2016.
- 2.11 Following assessment of the first 3 months of the project and its early success, the Council contacted the DWP to get an early view of ongoing funding for the project from them. Unfortunately it is proposed that the funding stream is to be reduced significantly in 2016/17 from the allocation given in 2015/16 and therefore the opportunity to continue funding the programme through this funding is not feasible. However we have been asked to contact again in October 2015 and December 2015 to see if this position has changed.
- 2.12 The GC&GPLEP launched in partnership with the big lottery a Building Better Opportunities (BBO) funding round for the period March 2016 – December 2019 (earliest completion). The areas were:
- Barriers to Work North – 1 successful partnership - £1,697,500 available
 - Financial Inclusion – 1 successful partnership - £1,212,500 available

- Social Inclusion & Poverty – 1 successful partnership - £970,000 available
- 2.13 In response the Council attended workshops relating to the BBO and made contacts with organisations who were building partnerships to make funding submissions. To help make the case for the Fenland area to be prioritised for action in all 3 funding themes the Council sent out a prospectus to 70+ partners who had expressed an interest in being involved. Alongside that the Council marketed some services that we felt could add value to project delivery. The Community House work was one project.
- 2.14 In response 2 lead partner organisations who are bidding to the funding stream “Barriers to Work North” asked for the Council to submit a proposal for the Community House service to be a support partner. Our submissions were accepted
- 2.15 We will not know the outcome from these 2 submissions until November 2015.
- 2.16 The Council have been working with the GC&GPLEP since 2013 making the case for Wisbech to be a potential; area that meets the criteria that could secure funding from the Community Locally Led Development fund (CLLD). From this the GC&GPLEP recognised Wisbech as a potential area for this fund alongside a part of Peterborough in the strategy it submitted to Government in January 2014.
- 2.17 Since then there has been discussion between the British Government and Europe on the prevalence of this funding and its criteria which has led to a significant delay in being rolled out. However throughout this period of uncertainty the Council has worked with GC&GPLEP to continue to make the case. Alongside this the Council has worked with key partners in the business, voluntary & community sector including the Wisbech Community Development Trust, The Ferry Project, Cambridgeshire Acre and Business In the Community to commence work on building the Local Action Group (LAG) that is required to be developed to help drive actions “to empower communities and devolve decision making to the lowest level to increase capacity”
- 2.18 Cambridgeshire Acre who have experience in managing European Funds of a similar nature are taking the role of lead administrators for the submission
- 2.19 The GC&GPLEP have informed the Council and partners that £750,000 has been set aside for Wisbech, if a LAG can evidence in a submission activity in Wisbech that will:
- Develop and implement a CLLD strategy
 - Build capacity locally
 - Draw up selection procedure to invite submissions for activities that meet CLLD strategy priorities in a non discriminatory and transparent way.
 - Secure an additional match fund of £750,000 to complement the CLLD grant from the GC&GPLEP
- 2.20 It is felt that the work undertaken at the house may be applicable to the CLLD strategy as the work looks to take residents who are far away from the workplace to be closer to being able to access work.
- 2.21 However this would be subject to a bid to the LAG and implementation of any projects would not be likely until April 2017 on the current timetable.
- 2.22 As a further risk Circle Housing Roddons (CHR) who own Community House and the Garden stated that they would be happy to continue to allow the Council to have the facility rent free for 2015/16 (as they have done since the transfer of the housing stock from the Council to CHR in November 2007). However they would not be able to guarantee this from April 2016. Early discussions have taken place on this with CHR looking at how the work has benefitted residents within their stock. These discussions will continue.

3 Effect on corporate objectives

3.1 The work at Community House contributes to:

- Communities – “Support vulnerable members of our community”
- Communities – “Promote health & well being”
- Environment – “ work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion
- Economy – “Raise aspirations and improve learning opportunities”

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 The implementation and delivery of the Flexible Support Fund project at Community House is working well with evidence that the work undertaken helps support residents to be better placed to access work. All target outcomes are on track to be delivered.
- 4.2 The Council has 2 submissions made for funding that would secure funding for the house for a 3 year period. We will not know the outcome from this work until November 2015
- 4.3 There is another potential funding source from the CLLD fund but that would not becoming available until April 17 and would be subject to match funding being secured, the CLLD strategy being accepted and funded by the GC&GPLEP and a bid for consideration to an emerging Local Action Group being accepted for the project delivery at the house.
- 4.4 CHR are considering their ability to continue to offer the house for free as part of their business plan setting process
- 4.5 Clearly the situation at the time of this report is that although there are potential avenues of funding being explored from 2016/17 there is no funding secured at this time. Therefore the work will be fed into the Comprehensive Service Review that is underway to support the delivery of the Council’s Medium Financial Term Strategy