

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	10 APRIL 2017	AGENDA ITEM:	13
TITLE:	COMMUNITY HUBS SPEND APPROVAL		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	CLLR LIZ TERRY	PORTFOLIO:	NEIGHBOURHOODS
SERVICE:	HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	REUBENA OVUORIE	TEL:	0118 93 73365
JOB TITLE:	PRINCIPAL PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER	E-MAIL:	Reubena.Ovuorie@reading.gov.uk

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Policy Committee on the 18th July 2016 considered a report on the future Library Service offer following an extensive review and public consultation. The Committee approved proposals in relation to the Community Hubs programme as follows:

- i. Maintain provision of library services from Battle Library with reduced opening hours, extending the current building and developing the site as a community hub, enabling access for community groups to part of the building outside opening hours.
- ii. Relocating library services in Southcote and South Reading to nearby community hubs with reduced staffing and opening hours.

1.2 Since that report the proposals have been further developed and spend approval is now sought prior to the Council undertaking the works. Plans have been developed to incorporate the following:

- i. Battle Library - a scheme has been developed to extend the library to provide increased community space.
- ii. Southcote Community Centre - a scheme has been developed to extend the existing Southcote Community Centre to enable relocation of Southcote Library and to improve the facilities at the Community Centre.
- iii. South Reading Youth and Community Centre - a scheme has been developed to improve the Community Centre, to relocate Whitley

Library and, subject to the outcome of a current consultation on the Children's Centre offer across the town, to relocate the Children's Centre into the Youth Centre to better utilise the space.

- 1.3 This report seeks spend approval for the estimated cost for these three Community Hubs projects - totalling £1.8m plus a 10% contingency (£2m). This will be delivered through a combination of the Capital Programme, external grant funding, Section 106 funding and capital receipts from the disposal of Whitley Library and Southcote Library.
- 1.4 In addition to the above, this report sets out the proposed procurement approach and seeks approval to enter into contracts with the preferred bidders.

2 RECOMMENDATION ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee notes the current position regarding the Community Hubs Programme and grants spend approval of up to £2m, subject to the proposed developments gaining necessary Planning permissions and Listed Building Consent as appropriate, to deliver:
 - a) an extension to Battle Library for up to £500,000;
 - b) an extension and improvement works to Southcote Community Centre for up to £550,000 and
 - c) improvement works to South Reading Youth and Community Centre for up to £750,000
 - d) and with an overall programme contingency of £200k.
- 2.2 That Policy Committee notes the procurement proposals and, subject to the proposed developments gaining Planning permissions and Listed Building Consent, delegates to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Neighbourhoods, the Head of Finance and the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the authority to enter into contracts with the winning bidder for each scheme.
- 2.3 That Policy Committee agrees to the disposal of the Whitley and Southcote Library sites on the open market and through the Community Letting Policy process and that the marketing results are reported back to a future meeting of Policy Committee for decision.

3 POLICY CONTEXT/BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At Policy Committee in July 2016 a new service offer for Libraries was agreed which will make more effective use of community buildings, reflect levels and patterns of usage across branch libraries, and responds to what our community have told us through an extensive consultation. Agreed savings of circa £300,000 were predicated on:

- Reducing opening hours across the network and introducing self-serve kiosks to reduce staffing costs;
- Developing a hub model in three areas where use is lowest and relocating library services in Southcote and South Reading in order to make the best possible use of buildings and enable a flexible shared staffing model; and
- Introducing a new Library Management System with enhanced functionality and streamlining processes including stock management to reduce costs.

3.2 It was proposed that Battle Library be retained and extended to further community use. Plans for the new Southcote, South Reading and Battle community hubs were exhibited throughout the Library Phase 2 consultation and feedback from the community has informed the final designs.

3.3 THE COMMUNITY HUBS

3.3.1 Battle Library

Battle Library is a listed building on the Oxford Rd which has benefited from a Heritage Lottery funded refurbishment. Following the consultation on library services and subsequent Policy Committee report, it was agreed to maintain provision of library services from Battle Library with reduced opening hours, extending the current building and developing the site as a community hub, enabling access for community groups to part of the building outside opening hours.

3.3.2 South Reading Youth and Community Centre

South Reading Community Centre (SRYCC) will provide a venue for the relocation of Whitley library including additional improvement works to increase legibility and optimise use of the building. The SRYCC also currently hosts a day nursery and Children's Centre and a Lottery funded refurbished café managed by the Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA). Co-location of the Library in the centre will enable a reduction from double to single staffing.

3.3.3 Southcote Community Centre

Southcote library will be relocated to Southcote Community Centre within an extended community hub offering a Children's Centre and community activities, including adult learning. Co-location will enable a reduction in staffing levels as above and more flexibility in staff roles to provide effective cover.

3.4 Procurement

3.4.1 Detailed specifications of works will be produced for each scheme. Each scheme would be procured either via a framework agreement which will require a 'mini competition' or a traditional tender process in line with the Council's Standing Orders.

3.5 Asset Disposal

3.5.1 Upon completion of the Southcote and South Reading community hub works and relocation of the library functions into the improved facilities, the existing library sites will become surplus to requirements in accordance with the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan.

3.5.2 The properties will be advertised on the open market seeking best offers for the existing buildings and also for potential redevelopment of the sites.

3.5.3 At the same time the properties will also be advertised through Reading Voluntary Action (RVA) in accordance with the Community Lettings Policy.

3.5.4 The results will then be reported to a subsequent meeting of Policy Committee seeking a decision on which basis to dispose of the properties.

4 NEXT STAGES

4.1 BATTLE LIBRARY

4.1.1. The scheme cost is currently estimated at up to £500,000. Funding of £400,000 has been approved from Section 106 grant for the Battle area to undertake the proposed building works. The additional £100,000 required could be covered through a further allocation from Section 106 contributions or from the designated Community Hubs Capital Budget provision.

4.1.2 Officers are looking to submit a full planning application and listed building consent in spring 2017 to undertake the works in autumn 2017. It is anticipated that the works will take six months to complete and officers will work with the contractor to maintain the operation of the library during this period as far as possible.

4.2 SOUTH READING YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE (SRYCC)

4.2.1 Officers are working to complete the specification to deliver the new library and improvements to the Centre. The design solution proposed allows the extent of meeting spaces and revenue income from lettings to be preserved; the library to be relocated; retention of sufficient storage; rationalisation of entrances and improvement in the legibility or 'flow' of the building - better linking the disparate parts of the space. Subject to recommendations following the Council's review of Children's Centres, it is proposed that the current Youth Centre is modified to enable the Children's Centre to operate from this space during the day whilst still allowing the space to be used for youth work and other activities at other times (again optimising income). This would make better use of the currently under-utilised Youth Centre, would increase the visibility of the Children's Centre and provide increased, better quality space

from which the service can operate including a new dedicated outdoor play area.

- 4.2.2 One of key aims of the design solution at SRYCC is to improve circulation across the building and works required to achieve this will involve some level of disruption, particularly noise. Officers will work with the contactor to minimise disruption to user groups during this period and to minimise the risk of lost revenue if user groups relocate to other venues temporarily.
- 4.2.3 The scheme cost is currently estimated at up to £750,000. This cost will be firmed up following the procurement exercise.
- 4.2.4 The proposed building works will involve mostly internal space alteration and reconfiguration with some external works to the forecourt. Planning approval will not be required for the internal works as this is deemed to be permitted development. Planning approval will be required for the external works.
- 4.2.5 It is anticipated that works will commence in Summer 2017 and will take six months to complete. The centre will continue to operate over the course of the improvement works and will be open for use by the community.

4.3 SOUTHCOLE COMMUNITY CENTRE

- 4.3.1 The plans are to undertake an extension and internal alterations to the centre to enable the relocation of the library and deliver improvements to enhance the functionality of the centre. These will include provision of a sound insulated space to be available for quiet study, inclusion of a new kitchenette in the hall to provide refreshments for events and the development of a safe space for children to play and to grow plants.
- 4.3.2 The scheme cost is currently estimated at up to £550,000. This cost will be firmed up following the procurement exercise.
- 4.3.3 Officers are working to submit a planning application by Spring 2017 and to start building works in Autumn 2017. Works are expected to take six months to complete and the Centre will continue to be open for use by the community during the works.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 This project contributes to achieving the following Corporate Plan priorities:
 - Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable;
 - Providing the best start in life through education, early help and healthy living;
 - Remaining financially sustainable to deliver these service priorities.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Community engagement activity was undertaken in respect of these hub plans as part of a phase 2 twelve week consultation on the Library Service future

offer. This included an exhibition and consultation on indicative plans for all three hubs and feedback has influenced the designs.

6.2 In South Reading where works are more extensive, a local SRYCC hub steering group (including community representatives, partners and elected members) has co-developed the vision for the hub and helped to develop and refine plans for the centre.

6.3 Further community engagement will be required in order to publicise changes to be made to the library service, development of community hubs and, as appropriate, through statutory planning consultations - this will include regular communications with staff, partners, library and community centre users.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

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

7.2 As previously reported at Policy Committee report on the 18th of July 2016, a full Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken in respect of the Southcote, South Reading and Battle library proposals as part of the Library service review.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Procurement for all the works will be in line with the Council's Standing Orders

8.2 The Council's Head of Legal & Democratic Services will draft the necessary documentation required to enter into a contract with the winning bidders for each scheme.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Capital Implications

Table 1 - Summary of the Community Hubs Capital Programme

Capital Programme reference from budget book: page line	2016/17 £000	2017/18 £000
Proposed Capital Expenditure	115	1,885

Funded by Section 106 (Battle area) Capital Receipts and RBC Community Hubs Capital Programme	115	400 1,485
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9.1 The creation of community hubs in existing buildings necessitates capital investment. Where libraries are re-located the release of assets would generate capital receipts to cross-fund works in other locations. £400,000 S106 grant for the Battle area has also been allocated for the extension works to Battle Library. The remaining funding requirement will be covered through a budgeted provision in the Council's capital programme for community hubs with a possible further allocation from Section 106 contributions to fund the full cost of Battle Library.

Value for Money

9.2 With the Council needing to maintain delivery of services to the community whilst under significant budgetary pressure, the development of community hubs enables more efficient use and rationalisation of public buildings to create well-used, improved and vibrant community spaces. Coupled with the benefits of cross working, the co-location of services additionally enables staff reductions and more flexible resourcing models to reduce revenue costs - delivering more financially sustainable services for the future.

Financial Risks

9.3 The risk of project cost overruns will be minimised through the work undertaken to develop robust cost estimates. The cost estimates include both an allowance for inflation and a contingency allowance for construction costs and professional fees. Value engineering measures will also occur throughout the process to manage costs and minimise any variance in the expected contract sum.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 Report to Policy Committee: Library Service Review (18 July 2016)