

Committee(s): Community Environment and Enforcement Committee	Date: 20 June 2022
Subject: Community Halls update	Wards Affected: Hutton North, Warley, Brentwood North
Report of: Kim Anderson, Corporate Manager Communities, Leisure and Health	Public
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Summary

The Council's Leisure Strategy vision sets out that it will support community groups and leisure, but also make best use of its assets, and deliver best value for money across the borough. The Community Halls provide strategic community spaces across the borough. The five Community Halls are back under direct management of Brentwood Council after Brentwood Leisure Trust went into liquidation in November 2020.

The five community halls include Merrymede House, Nightingale Centre, Bishops Hall, Hutton Poplars Hall and Hutton Poplars Lodge.

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. Due to the Brentwood Leisure Trust going into liquidation in November 2020 the five community halls came back under Brentwood Borough Council to directly manage. These halls are Merrymede House, Bishops Hall, Hutton Poplars Hall, Hutton Poplars Lodge and the Nightingale Centre.
2. The Council does not have the resources to operate and maintain the community halls so sought third party operators to run, manage and maintain the facility or provide commercial rental income to offset the maintenance costs of these halls.
3. In July 2021 a tender exercise asked for expressions of interest into management of one or all of the halls. There was little response for this exercise when it closed. This was reported to Committee on 13 September 2021 Community and Health Committee min. ref. 103.

- R1. Delegate authority to the Director of Environment and Community to liaise with the Leisure Strategy Working Group and the Chair of Community and Health Committee to review options for the Community Halls and agree the next steps.
 - R2 To identify the costs to manage the Halls directly as an interim arrangement
 - R3 to bring a report back to a future Community and Health Committee with recommendations for consideration.
4. Subsequently following the tender exercise and the report to committee a number of different individuals and groups have contacted the Council to express their interest.
 5. As a result, a number of meetings have been had with these interested parties on the various community halls and this report provides an update for Members on the progress to date.
 6. **Merrymeade House:** Officers have had meetings with the existing tenants such as the Tea Room, the Buddhist Centre and 'Salsa lady' regarding their demise and agreement on rental payments as part of any new leases. This is likely to be a mixture of commercial and community rental income. The Council is also working closely with Brentwood Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) whose offices are currently located in the Multi Storey Car Park.
 7. Officers are proposing offering office space at Merrymeade House as well as the opportunity to rent out two other rooms which will provide a sustainable income stream to their organisation. CVS are currently in the process of revising their Articles of Association and Terms of Reference with the Charity Commission which will enable them to be able to generate income. It is proposed that any new lease agreements with these tenants will be finalised by September 2022.
 8. **Bishops Hall:** Meetings have been held with Kind Hearts Nursery who currently operate a term time nursery on the site, Pilgrims Hatch Baptist Church, Manna Meals and YMCA to look at mutual beneficial ways of managing Bishops Hall for the benefit of the local community. Some improvement works have also been carried out in the kitchen area which provides facilities for all of those who are using the Hall. Following these discussions with all parties draft Heads of Terms of lease are currently being worked up with the nursery to manage the hall and any bookings with Manna Meals, Pilgrims Hatch Baptist Church and the YMCA being regular hirers of the facility.

9. **Nightingale Centre:** Currently SNAP (Special Needs and Parents) occupy 2 office spaces within the Nightingale Centre and are looking to expand their offer from their existing facility within the adjacent SNAP building. They are currently looking at options and plans to be able to deliver this. Officers are looking at a short-term lease with them while the plans are fully costed and are viable to be delivered. The Hall is also used as a Polling Station and Rest Centre as well as other community hire activities such as Tea Dances and Salsa dancing who are regular fixtures at the Hall. The Council would be keen to ensure that these elements are still available.
10. **Hutton Poplars Hall:** Ongoing legal negotiations are in progress for Hutton Poplars Hall which is being led by the Assets team.
11. **Hutton Poplars Lodge:** No one has shown interest in managing this hall. Hutton Poplars Lodge provides facilities for the only regular users, Hutton Poplars Bowling Club such as a small kitchen, toilets and meeting room for approximately 40 members during the bowling season from April to September. They also use this facility throughout the off season for ad-hoc meetings and social events. It has been agreed in principle that the Hutton Poplars Bowling Club can continue to use the facility for the 2023 season (April to September 2023). The Council is assisting the Club at looking at other options for a base.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

12. The Council does not have the resources to operate and maintain the community halls so where possible needs to look at third party operators to maintain the facility or provide commercial rental income to offset the maintenance costs of these halls.
13. The Council is still keen that any compliance works are still with the Council to do so that it ensures that these works are carried out and the halls remain in a good standard.
14. The Council needs to ensure that the facilities that it manages are delivering value for money and meet the needs of the residents.

Consultation

15. Several meetings have taken places with various organisations that have shown interest in the management of the halls to get their feedback.
16. Officers are obtaining information on the amount of commercial rent that can be achieved from the community halls and any organisation that is

proposing less than the commercial rate will need to demonstrate the social value that they are providing.

References to Corporate Plan

17. The community halls is under the Developing Communities strand and also forms part of the Assets portfolio.

Implications

Financial Implications

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18. The Community Halls require ongoing maintenance. The Council also needs to ensure that any compliance requirements are undertaken such as Health and Safety and Fire, and that regular cleaning is undertaken. With leases to third parties to manage the various halls there is an opportunity to reduce Council overheads and increase the income generated from the Community Halls that can ringfenced to maintain these assets.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Amanda Julian, Corporate Director (Law & Governance) and Monitoring Officer
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19. Any lease arrangements and title matters will be dealt with by legal officers on a hall-by-hall basis to ensure that all legalities regarding the lettings have been drafted and reported to on clients.

Economic Implications

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There are no direct economic implications. Use of community halls by businesses or for business related events can help to have a positive economic benefit for things such as learning and networking.

Equality and Diversity Implications

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20. The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:

- a. Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc. on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
 - b. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - c. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
21. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
22. The proposals in this report will not have a disproportionate adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.