

**7 January 2015**

**Housing & Health Committee**

**Resource Room Development at Hutton Community Centre**

**Report of:** *Helen Gregory, Acting Head of Housing Services*

**Wards Affected:** *Hutton North*

**This report is:** *Public*

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 It had been suggested by resident groups that a community resource could be developed and be based at the Hutton Community Centre.
- 1.2 The report of the Hutton Community Centre Task and Finish Group to Audit and Scrutiny Committee on 28 October 2014 made reference to a plan put forward to possibly utilise the former cellar for a Housing lead project to create a community advice facility.
- 1.3 The suggested plan was to use the former cellar once it was refurbished as a drop in centre for residents to use computers and speak with volunteers about a number of issues. These would include and not restricted to making universal credit online application, choice based lettings bids, job applications and using the internet in general.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 Committee is asked to recognise the contribution that Tenant Talkback members make improving council services**
- 2.2 The Strategic Asset Manager reviews the possibility of providing a resident resource area within the Town Hall.**
- 2.3 Consider the funding support to Family Mosaic to operate a free drop in service at the community centre.**

### **3. Introduction and Background**

- 3.1 Audit & Scrutiny Committee on 28 October 2014 requested that Housing Committee consider the costs of developing the former cellar at the Hutton Community Centre into a resource for tenants and community regarding council services.
- 3.2 Since the community centre reopened residents have been able to visit and use computer facilities in the office/resource room for their needs and staff assisted them with online applications for choice based lettings bids etc.
- 3.3 This has not been widely publicised because of the limited size of the room and considerations of confidentiality. Tenant Talkback agreed to make a contribution of £500 per year for the use of the facilities and this is being monitored and will be reviewed at the end of the year.
- 3.4 The suggestion put forward was for consideration of funding the refurbishment of the former cellar including if possible the installation of a window as only two skylights provide any natural light in the room.
- 3.5 The issue was discussed at Tenant Talkback on 28 October and 25 November 2014 where the chair suggested that the Locally Determined Community Housing Budget for tenant lead environmental improvements could perhaps be used to fund the refurbishments.
- 3.6 The Community Centre Facilities Officer, is a council tenant and a member of Tenant Talkback, informed the meeting that the centre had applications from two local nurseries to lease facilities and a willingness to fund refurbishments to meet their needs. Tenant Talkback understood of the need for the centre to be run commercially. They accepted that there was likely to be greater consideration of the commercial need to the continued success of the community centre.
- 3.7 The resident plan had been to use the larger room, which would provide more facilities and not tie up the computers used by the centre staff enabling them to deal with confidential matters. Residents would volunteer to assist people and have some training on various issues around welfare reform etc. The likely frequency of service would be twice a week.

#### **4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options**

- 4.1 The issues to consider are the commercial viability of the community centre against a local voluntary assistance service where there is currently no analysis of need and want.
- 4.2 There is a need to consider the costs of refurbishment of this room, expansion of broadband facilities, computer and furniture, plus the ongoing license fee for the use.
- 4.3 The use of untrained or partly trained volunteers to provide advice, is admirable and where possible should be supported. It does raise concerns that the areas such as welfare reform is best suited to professionally trained staff providing that support and advice.
- 4.4 As there is no specific analysis about possible take up of a service, no costings have been obtained regarding the refurbishment and fixtures and fittings.
- 4.5 Tenant Talkback had suggested that funds from the Locally Determined Community Housing Budget could be used. However this would mean the possibility of already submitted estate based improvement bids being deferred to help fund the refurbishments.
- 4.6 At the 25 November 2014 Tenant Talkback meeting the possible usage of the resource room was unknown. It was discussed that consideration for two nurseries may be possible once the Town Hall is refurbished.
- 4.7 Family Mosaic offers a free drop in advice service to Brentwood residents at Dodd Road Community Church every Wednesday between 10:30 – 13:00. They are interested in trialling a similar service at the community centre initially on a monthly basis to ascertain demand. They have fully trained staff to provide a range of advice and support with debt, benefits, housing advice and helping people into work.
- 4.8 They have free use of the Doddinghurst Road Community Church and do not have the funds to rent facilities and have been seeking our assistance in assisting in the financing of a trial from the Community Centre.
- 4.9 It has been suggested that a license fee to a community/charitable group of £10 per hour could be charged. As they would be looking at providing a drop in session for approximately 2½ hours per month which would equate to £300 per year. This could increase with demand for more frequent sessions.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 5.1 The Committee is asked to note the work of residents groups and Tenant Talkback in proposing a community resource and to volunteer to undergo training and provide advice and support to other residents.
- 5.2 While there is no analysis of potential demand consider Family Mosaic's request for financial assistance to run a drop in service from the centre.
- 5.3 Tenant Talkback are keen to have a resource facility for their use and residents and are keen to explore the possibility of having this based at the Town Hall. Therefore the Strategic Asset Manager be asked to evaluate if there is a possibility of providing an area for Tenant Talkback members that can provide help and assistance to residents over and above that provided by service departments.

## **6. Consultation**

- 6.1 As previously stated this proposed project has been discussed at Tenant Talkback and referred to in the Hutton Community Centre Task and Finish Group.
- 6.2 Family Mosaic representatives have met with the Interim Head of Housing Services and the Principal Officer Tenancy Services. They have visited the community centre and discussed their operation and needs to the Community Facilities Officer.

## **7. References to Corporate Plan**

- 7.1 Localism: we believe that through bringing communities together and working effectively in collaboration with a range of groups and organisations we can better ensure the future wellbeing of our Borough. We will work with local businesses, community groups and voluntary sector to develop projects that will enhance and support the local community.
- 7.2 Housing, Health and Wellbeing: current legislative reforms will lead to significant changes to the way the council supports people in housing need and in receipt of state benefits. We will develop different ways of working, both in the way we deliver services and with the voluntary sector, to make sure that the more vulnerable residents in Brentwood are protected and help goes to those in need of it.

## 8. Implications

### Financial Implications

**Name & Title:** Jo-Anne Ireland, Acting Chief Executive

**Tel & Email:** 01277 312712 / jo-anne.ireland@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.1 Possible cost of funding the license fee for Family Mosaic to use the community centre initially would be in the region of £300 in the first year and this would be met through existing HRA budget. This could rise if demand is proven.

### Legal Implications

**Name & Title:** Christopher Potter, Monitoring Officer and Corporate Support Services

**Tel & Email:** 01277 312860 / christopher.potter@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.2 None

**Other Implications** (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.3 The possible need to entering into a licensing agreement with Family Mosaic.

- 8.4 Consideration of an area within the Town Hall for Tenant Talkback members to use.

## 9. Background Papers (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 9.1 None

## 10. Appendices to this report

None

### Report Author Contact Details:

**Name:** Helen Gregory, Acting Head of Housing Service

**Telephone:** 01277 312540

**E-mail:** helen.gregory@brentwood.gov.uk