

BODY: Cabinet

DATE: 13 December 2016

SUBJECT: Bridgemere Centre

REPORT OF: Director of Service Delivery

Ward(s): St. Anthony's; Hampden Park

Purpose: To seek Members' approval for allocation of a capital funding to the Bridgemere Centre

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Recommendations: Cabinet is recommended to approve the use of £20,000 capital funding to facilitate community ownership of a community centre on a sustainable basis.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Bridgemere Centre was built in the mid-1980s with support from Eastbourne Borough Council.
- 1.2 The Centre is located on Environment Agency land in Bridgemere Road and offers local residents a wide range of services including a Breakfast and After School Club, a Parent and Toddler Group, 'Bridgebuilders' activities for adults with learning disabilities, activities for teenagers, and an Indoor Bowls club.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Bridgemere Centre was built in the 1986 with help from Eastbourne Borough Council grants to the local Residents' Association. Following the collapse of that association, ownership of the building reverted to the freeholders, the Southern Water Authority.
- 2.2 To ensure the building continued in use as a Community Centre, the Council asked the local Community Church to take over management of the building. Members of the Community Church established the Bridgemere Centre Limited and have been managing the building since the late 1990s.

- 2.3 Since taking on the lease of the building, the Bridgemere Centre Ltd. have face increases in rent imposed by successors to the Southern Water, currently the Environment Agency, from £1,500 to £9,500.
- 2.4 The Trustees of the Centre have found it increasingly difficult to generate the income required to pay this level of rent and have been negotiating with the Environment Agency to purchase the freehold of the property. This offers a more sustainable future for the Centre. They have succeeded in agreeing a reduced purchase price of £95,000 for the freehold of the site and building.
- 2.5 The Bridgemere Centre Trustees have succeeded in raising a grant of £20,000 and loans from the Community Church of £45,000 and £10,000 from an individual supporter towards the purchase price and legal costs. They have approached the Council asking for a grant or loan of £20,000 to make up the shortfall.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 It is proposed that a sum of £20,000 is offered as a one-off grant to the Bridgemere Centre Ltd. to enable them to purchase the freehold subject to the following conditions:
- The grant is made subject to a signed agreement confirming:
 - its use solely for the purchase of the property, such purchase to be made within a reasonable time frame (early in 2017);
 - the requirement that the property is to be used as a community centre for 40 years, provided that this requirement will cease to have effect if the grant is repaid in full together with interest payable at RPI (or equivalent); and
 - repayment of the grant in full together with interest payable at RPI (or equivalent) if there is any breach of the grant conditions.
 - The Council's investment is protected by putting a charge on the property protected by registration of a restriction.
 - No Eastbourne Borough Council Community Grants will be made towards the core costs of running the Bridgemere Centre in future years.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 The Trustees of the Bridgemere Centre have been consulted about alternative options including support to negotiate a lower rent but are keen to proceed with the purchase of the building if possible as this offers a much more sustainable future for the Centre.

5.0 Resource Implications

- 5.1 The proposal is for a grant of £20,000 to be made to Bridgemere Centre Ltd. to enable them to purchase the freehold of the community centre which they currently manage.
- 5.2 This contribution would allow the Bridgemere Centre Ltd. to run the Centre on a sustainable financial footing in the future and would remove the need to continue supporting the Centre with grants, freeing up an average of £3,000 a year, thereby covering the costs of this investment within 7 years.

6.0 Implications for Equalities and Fairness

- 6.1 The Bridgemere Centre offers opportunities for people of all ages to receive services and support and engage in activities which help reduce social isolation and promote positive health and employment outcomes. The Centre has fully inclusive policies and procedures.

7.0 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Legal implications are set out in the body of this report.

8.0 Other Implications

- 8.1 There are no Environmental, Staffing or other implications arising from this report.

9.0 Recommendations

- 9.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the use of £20,000 capital funding to facilitate community ownership of a community centre subject to the conditions set out at 3.1 above.

Ian Fitzpatrick
Director of Service Delivery

Background Papers:

None.