

CABINET
16th March 2021

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DEMOCRACY, STRATEGY AND
PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO HOLDER

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PORTFOLIO HOLDER

KEY DECISION: No

REPORT NO. DCS2102

RUSHMOOR FOOD HUB

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The response and process for recovery from Covid conditions have enabled the Council to explore community-led approaches to sustainable food provision via increasing community capacity and strengthening partnership working.

Over the past year, the Council has been working with a range of partners and local volunteers to develop a new, sustainable, collaborative approach to food provision, specifically through:

- The development of a local food partnership
- Provision of a community store – St Johns Hall, Windsor Way, Aldershot
- Provision of community larders and fridges – Aldershot
- Understanding future provision for Farnborough and North Camp

The project is moving forward well and is being finalised for implementation over the next couple of months. As a consequence, the Cabinet is recommended to:

- i) Endorse the establishment of a Rushmoor Food Hub on the basis set out in this Report; and
- ii) Approve the provision of 90% rent relief for a two-year period in relation to a lease from the Council for the period until 31st March 2023.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Covid has been the catalyst for bringing together an increased community awareness of local needs, and a willingness in local supermarkets to provide donations and reduce food waste. These conditions have enabled the Council to explore community-led approaches to sustainable food provision via increasing community capacity and strengthening partnership working.
- 1.2 The development of a charitable partnership is pivotal to coordinating an effective response to Covid and ensuring a community led approach to sustained food provision in the Borough. The aim of the partnership is to encourage and support community food provision across the Borough, focused

on principles such as reducing food waste, reducing stigma, connecting communities and raising nutritional awareness

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Setting up the partnership forms part of the Council's Covid recovery work and overlaps with the Supporting Communities Strategy, particularly around the priorities of addressing economic hardship, physical and mental health and connecting communities. The focus on reducing waste through sharing or exchange mechanisms also closely aligns with the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan.
- 2.2 A key responsibility of the partnership will be to support its members to self-sustain initiatives through grant funding, local sponsorship and donations. There will be no Council obligation to provide regular support once the partnership is established and existing ring-fenced grants are transferred. In line with this, the partnership will run the community store site like a business as part of its responsibilities across the Borough.

3 COMMUNITY FOOD PARTNERSHIP

- 3.1 Work to establish a community food partnership as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) is progressing. Two founding trustees have been identified, who have been instrumental in developing the approach for Aldershot so far. The remaining three trustee roles are being recruited to during March 2021. The board will strive to reflect Rushmoor's communities in its diversity. A group of volunteers has already been established to provide wider support.
- 3.2 Once the board of trustees is formed, work to register the partnership as a CIO with the Charities Commission can progress. Once submitted, the application will be determined within 30 days so the partnership could be established by early May 2021.
- 3.3 It is anticipated that the partnership will be structured as an association. This is a membership structure with an overarching board of trustees who are elected for set terms based on the votes of members. The Council could become a member alongside Rushmoor Voluntary Services, if desired. It will continue to perform the locally trusted role to ensure existing grant obligations are met.

4 THE ALDERSHOT COMMUNITY STORE

- 4.1 A site has been located at the former St. John's Ambulance headquarters on Windsor Way which offers a positive interim use for a vacant Council-owned property in the short-term until the site transfers to Rushmoor Homes Ltd. This would allow the Council-run Food Hub to move out of Princes Hall to start the development of the community-led Aldershot Community Store, offering choice, fresh food and the chance for people to "give back" if they can/want to. The site is well-located and offers fantastic space to develop broader outreach work involving a range of services from local organisations such as Citizen's Advice,

NHS health services, etc. There is also potential to run a Men's Shed and offer skills and employment opportunities from the site, both of which are in the Supporting Communities Action Plan.

- 4.2 The set-up for this site is being seed-funded by dedicated grants for food provision under Covid-19. Links have already been established with Morrisons and The Co-Op and the Council is in discussions with the Trussell Trust about working together going forward.
- 4.3 The site at Windsor Way is Council-owned so compliance works have been identified and instructed. These works have been agreed with consideration to minimise the cost in proportion to the short-term lease. Draft heads of terms for the lease are complete and pending agreement. Work by Legal to draft the lease is pending approval of the project by the Cabinet.
- 4.4 Once established, a community food partnership charity will become the tenant, entering into a short-term lease with the Council for an approximate period of two years. A Tenancy at Will may be required depending on timescales with the Charity Commission, after which the lease can be assigned to the partnership. The lease stipulates a break clause of four months' notice for both parties to terminate the agreement and for the tenant to vacate the site. This includes the option for the tenant to vacate without carrying out any works deemed to be uneconomical. In this eventuality, the lease will terminate subject to all other lease conditions having been met.
- 4.5 The site is likely to be managed through a part-time paid role, funded via grants. All other work will be carried out by volunteers.
- 4.6 The seeking of planning permission for a Change of Use has been approved by the Portfolio Holder for Democracy, Strategy and Partnerships and is planned for determination at the Development Management Committee in March 2021. Rate Relief will be considered once the liability has been assigned.
- 4.7 The partnership will provide an important service to the community and support a number of the Council's strategic priorities. Whilst it is in its infancy and reliant on volunteers and grants, it is recommended that the Council approve the provision of 90% rent relief for a two-year period until 31st March 2023.
- 4.8 After this period, and upon the termination of the lease, options to relocate the Community Store, including within the Union Yard redevelopment, are being considered. This would allow a long-term focus on a broader community-led hub model not only providing food support but continuing to develop increasingly innovative and transformational initiatives to benefit local people, such as low waste packaging.

5 ALDERSHOT COMMUNITY LARDERS

- 5.1 Park Church in Church Lane East, Aldershot is progressing well with its plan to open a community larder which will be located at the church car park. Anticipated opening is in April 2021.

- 5.2 Aldershot Town Football Club is also on-board and looking to be set up for a larder when they can welcome fans back to the ground.
- 5.3 Both sites are eligible for one-off seed funding from dedicated grants for food provision under Covid-19. On-going costs will be met through local sponsorship, fundraisers and grant funding.

6 PROVISION FOR FARNBOROUGH AND NORTH CAMP

- 6.1 Work is in early stages in Farnborough and North Camp, but there is healthy interest from individuals, businesses, organisations and charities alike following community responses to the pandemic. Once established, the partnership will seek to develop work in this area.
- 6.2 As with Aldershot, seed funding is available from existing dedicated grants for food provision under Covid-19. Additionally, on behalf of the partnership, the Council has been successful in securing additional funding from the Connect4Communities Winter Grant Scheme. This will be ring-fenced to seed-fund community initiatives predominantly for Farnborough and North Camp.

7 FINANCIAL ISSUES

- 7.1 The Government has been very supportive to communities during the pandemic in the provision of food and essential supplies to those that are clinically extremely vulnerable and those in need. Funding streams have been provided at certain times to support this work which have included allocations through DeFRA and Hampshire Connect4Communities. Like many authorities, Rushmoor is seeking to develop a longer-term solution for providing support with these monies but to include a focus on education and encouraging individual responsibility. The resources are targeted at set up and to enable the first two years of operation of the CIO. A copy of the indicative budget is set out in the Annex to this report, but the annual expenditure budget will need to be determined by the CIO once it is established.
- 7.2 The Council's current policy on rent relief is for a maximum rent relief level of 90% for voluntary organisations using the Council's land/premises with the Head of Regeneration and Property authorised in consultation to negotiate appropriate rents at lease renewals. For this project it is proposed to grant 90% rent relief for the first two years to support the partnership to get up and running and this will be formalised in the agreement. An application will also be made for rate relief once the CIO is established.
- 7.3 The arrangements for how rent relief is accounted for across the Council's properties and budgets will be reviewed during 2021/22 to promote transparency and best practice.

8 RISKS

- 8.1 The risk to the Council is low. There will be no obligation to provide regular support once the partnership is established and existing ring-fenced grants are transferred.
- 8.2 The partnership will run the community store site like a business as part of its responsibilities across the Borough and to its members. This includes agreement for the landlord and tenant to discuss any arising major works needed to the site during the lease that may be uneconomical for the partnership to take on. In this eventuality, the lease allows the tenant to terminate the agreement using the stated notice period, without any obligation to carry out the works. The site would then return fully to the Council until its transfer to Rushmoor Homes Ltd.
- 8.3 The Council may wish to consider a role on the partnership board to provide strategic support and maintain involvement. This may help to mitigate any future risks.

9 EQUALITIES

- 9.1 The make-up of the partnership board will strive to reflect Rushmoor's diverse communities. The Council will carry out an equalities impact assessment.

10 CONCLUSIONS

- 10.1 The response to the pandemic has shown that the Borough has active and resilient communities. The Rushmoor Food Hub and associated projects seek to utilise the enthusiasm and collaboration with local communities and partners to complement the Council's community leadership role. The officers have provided briefings for the Portfolio Holder and the Covid-19 Recovery Champion who has supported the approach. The approach taken in the response to and recovery from the pandemic has been to provide help where needed but also to encourage and support residents to help themselves wherever possible. This is encapsulated by the work around local food provision.

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CONTACTS

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ANNEX 1

RUSHMOOR FOOD HUB - FINANCES

INCOME:		
DeFRA grant	<i>Government grant for food, essential supplies and associated infrastructure</i>	£64,000.00
Hampshire Connect4Communities winter grant	<i>Predominantly ringfenced for developing initiatives in Farnborough and North Camp</i>	£24,000.00
RVS grant	<i>Ring-fenced for community store fit-out</i>	£3,000.00
TOTAL:		£91,000.00
SET-UP COSTS:		
Planning fees for community store		£462.00
Legal fees for community store (<i>approx.</i>)		£360.00
Contribution to community store compliance works		£3,690.00
Community store fit-out (<i>approx.</i>)		£4,000.00
Community store volunteer training (<i>approx.</i>)		£300.00
Seed funding to Park Church Community Larder		£3,816.00
Seed funding to ATFC Community Larder/Fridge (<i>approx.</i>)		£2,000.00
Seed funding for Community Larders/Fridges and stock in Farnborough and North Camp		£24,000.00
TOTAL:		£38,628.00
ANNUAL EXPENDITURE (community store)		
Rent (<i>approx. and pending Rent Relief decision</i>)		£800.00
Business Rates (<i>80% mandatory charitable relief and potential discretionary 20% top-up</i>)		Nil
Buildings insurance (<i>approx.</i>)		£160.00
Other applicable insurances (<i>approx.</i>)		£200.00
Health and safety compliance checks (<i>approx.</i>)		£1,356.00
Utilities (<i>approx.</i>)		£2,000.00
Staffing (<i>approx.</i>)		£15,000.00
Provision of food and essential supplies and support for users (Provisional)		£4,000.00
Ongoing staff/volunteer training and development		£1,000.00
Contingency – Maintenance		£1,500.00
TOTAL:		£26,016.00

Note: Estimated annual budget based on years 1 and 2 and subject to agreement by the CIO