

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITY SAFETY & WASTE MANAGEMENT CABINET PANEL**

**FRIDAY 4 MARCH 2016 AT 10.00AM**

**CO-LOCATING FOUR LIBRARIES WITH RETAINED FIRE STATIONS**

Agenda Item

No.

**5**

Report of the Director Community Protection (Chief Fire Officer)

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Executive Members: Richard Thake - Community Safety & Waste Management  
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Chris Hayward - Resources & Performance

**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to brief Panel Members on feasibility work completed in considering the opportunity to co-locate four libraries with retained fire stations in the county. The towns/villages included in this project are Buntingford, Redbourn, Sawbridgeworth and Wheathampstead.
- 1.2 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Fire & Rescue Service Transformation Grant Funding of £700,000 was secured in October 2014 to support the project.
- 1.3 During the last year feasibility work has considered the viability of delivering the project's outcomes (Section 3.2) at each of the four sites. The feasibility work has shown the services' requirements and project objectives can be met at all four sites and we are now seeking approval to progress the project to the next stage of delivery.

**2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Panel considers and comments upon the content of the report.

**3.0 Background**

- 3.1 In October 2014 DCLG advised "in principle" agreement to HFRS' (Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service) bid for Grant Funds within the Fire & Rescue Service Transformation Programme (small scale funding pool < £2m per application). Grant Funding of £700,000 was awarded towards a co-location and integration project concerning four Libraries and their local retained Fire Stations.
- 3.2 The core objectives of the bid were as follows:

- To co-locate retained fire stations with another local service to improve asset utilisation.
- To support the *Inspiring Libraries* Strategy in addressing the need to relocate or re provide 11 libraries, which include three libraries in this project.
- To innovatively redesign under-utilised space within retained fire stations and create extensions, as necessary, to deliver a multi service property asset.
- To deliver four library buildings that are bright, attractive, welcoming, flexible, tech-enabled spaces in convenient locations.
- To support the *Inspiring Libraries* Strategy, HFRS and HCC's drive to reduce revenue costs by co locating HCC properties, thereby reducing overall property running costs for the two services.
- To release surplus public sector assets.

3.3 The four settlements identified for the programme were as follows:

	<b>Settlement</b>	<b>FRS Location</b>	<b>Current Library Location</b>
1	<b>Buntingford</b>	Station Road	77 High Street
2	<b>Sawbridgeworth</b>	Station Road	The Forebury
3	<b>Redbourn</b>	High Street	Lamb Lane
4	<b>Wheathampstead</b>	Marford Road	Marford Road

3.4 Three of the library sites are held freehold. Outline schemes have been modelled to have assurance on the potential capital receipts. At these sites, on agreement to progress, the next step will be to submit regulation 4 Planning Applications to the relevant District Planning Authorities for the designate disposal sites and simultaneously lodge Regulation 3 Planning Applications for alterations and extensions to create integrated fire station / libraries.

The Public Consultation activities and timing of submission of the Applications will be carefully scheduled in order to provide full clarity as to HCC' intentions for library re-provision.

3.5 Wheathampstead Library is held under a lease from the Parish Council. The original contractual lease term has already expired. HCC can therefore exit the lease liability without contingent liability risk at any time upon 6 months' prior notice. Wheathampstead Parish Council have plans to refurbish the Memorial Hall, this may have implications for the library moving forward.

#### **4. Feasibility of the Project in meeting the Service's Requirements**

4.1 The feasibility work has concluded that the core objectives of the DCLG Fire & Rescue Service Transformation Grant Funding can be achieved at all four sites. In essence improving and sustaining county council services in four small towns/villages in the county, whilst reducing the County Council's revenue expenditure in the long term.

From Hertfordshire Fire and Rescues' perspective the services asset

utilisation will be greatly improved. Making these sites more cost effective through partnering with another service and making the site available for greater community use throughout the day and evening.

Sharing common areas/ facilities to avoid local duplication and realising revenue cost savings on property overheads.

Creating the opportunity to engage with library users to promote key fire safety messages and a broader understanding of the service, whilst using the draw of a visit to the fire station to broaden the libraries client base.

- 4.2 The Library Service see's the project as a major opportunity to re provide four libraries and deliver purpose built, ground floor, developed sites that will meet the service's ambition of bright, attractive, welcoming, flexible, tech-enabled spaces in convenient locations, whilst reducing revenue expenditure.

Based on condition, suitability, size and location Buntingford, Redbourn and Sawbridgeworth libraries where identified within the *Inspiring Libraries Strategy* as high priority to relocate or re-provide by actively seeking opportunities to work with partners. These buildings if retained would be particularly high cost to improve and maintain to meet the ambitions of the *Inspiring Libraries Strategy*.

Co-locating Wheathampstead Library with the retained fire station will reduce its revenue expenditure in terms of no longer paying lease costs.

The additional significant advantage of this project is the opportunity to design these libraries to deliver the *Inspiring Libraries* strategy. At Buntingford to increase the public accessible space and greatly improve the facilities to meet a Tier 2 library's requirements. At Redbourn, Sawbridgeworth and Wheathampstead to design the libraries specifically as Community Libraries run as partnerships between the Library service and local community groups, and supervised primarily by volunteers.

Having libraries co-located with retained fire stations presents the opportunity for the service to enhance its engagement with people who are interested in the Fire Service, in particular boys and dads.

- 4.3 The proposed library re-provision will be as follows:

	Settlement	Accessible Public Library Space m <sup>2</sup>	
		Current	Proposed
1	Buntingford	146*	168
2	Sawbridgeworth	105**	99
3	Redbourn	110	116
4	Wheathampstead	101	98

\*The current public area of the public library at Buntingford Library is 112m<sup>2</sup>. There is also a meeting room at the rear of the Library, but this is not fully accessible as access is up a steep ramp.

\*\*Sawbridgeworth Library is currently delivered over two floors, with access to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor by a flight

stairs, which is not ideal from an accessibility perspective.

- 4.4 Building and site floor plans for the integrated fire station / libraries are available on request.
- 4.5 Transport Statements are being provided for all four sites; at this stage the feasibility exercise suggests that the sites can be made safe for the dual use by Fire Services and the general public. The requirements for Transport Statements are rigorous to ensure that the vehicle and pedestrian impact of the development proposal both on the subject site and the wider locality are fully covered. Work Summary for the Transport Statements using Redbourn and Buntingford as examples are available on request.

## 5. Financial Feasibility

- 5.1 The consolidation from eight properties to four will yield significant revenue savings of £98,000 per annum, even after set off for the additional running costs at the integrated sites:
- exiting poor condition properties in favour of new extensions built to concurrent Building Standards,
  - prevent the need for major repair and ongoing costs at the current library sites,
  - avoids expenditure into buildings that are not suitable for future service provision,
  - delivers energy consumption efficiencies through a reduction in HCC' footprint in the subject settlements.
  - Saves fixed property overheads (Business Rates) saved,
  - avoids lease costs (Wheathampstead).
- 5.2 HCC Capital Investment to provide Net Capital Funding of £186,902 will be required in order to deliver the integrated property solutions by Spring 2017. This Capital expenditure has already been secured as part of the *Inspiring Libraries* Invest to Transform bid in 2014. This capital funding has been secured by the Library Service specifically to deliver projects that achieve revenue savings by 2017/18.
- 5.3 It will not be possible to complete disposals of the surplus library sites until Spring 2017. Valuation Advice forecasts capital receipts totalling £1,247,512 across three transactions.
- 5.4 The quantum of available S106 Funds may increase above the current level of £128,586 and is dependent upon the pace of residential development over the next 18 months.

5.5 The financial summary for the project is as follows:

Income	£
DCLG Grant	700,000
Section 106	128,586
Capital receipts	1,247,512
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>2,076,098</b>
Expenditure	
Project costs	2,263,000
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>2,263,000</b>
Inspiring Libraries Invest to Transform Funding *	186,902
Revenue Expenditure Savings per annum from 2017/18	98,000

\*Capital Funding secured to directly support Library Savings Targets of £2.5m by 2017/18

## 6. Community Engagement

6.1 To date the details of the projects' proposals around library and fire station co-locations have not been shared with local communities in any depth, awaiting the results of whether the project is feasible in the first instance from the services' perspective.

6.2 The award of the DCLG grant funding and the initiation of the project's feasibility process was documented within the *Inspiring Libraries Strategy - Implementation* paper that went to Customer Service, Performance and Libraries Cabinet Panel in March 2015.

This resulted in briefing a couple of groups that are directly affected by any future decisions on their local library.

6.3 The Redbourn Library Volunteers group, which have partnered with the Library Service to run Redbourn as a Community Library, are aware and positive about the proposals to move the library to the fire station.

6.4 At Wheathampstead the Parish Council has been kept informed of the proposals, as the library is currently delivered from the Parish Council's Memorial Hall. The Parish Council have provided positive initial feedback on the co-location plans.

6.5 In November 2015, the Buntingford in Transition Group presented a petition to Panel objecting to the plan to move Buntingford Library to the fire station site. However, this was before the plans for the new library had been

published and there was an assumption among the petitioners that the new facility would be reduced in size from the current library. The Buntingford in Transition Group have since presented the County Council with an alternative proposal for the redevelopment of the current library building.

- 6.6 Now that it is clear that the project is feasible, able to deliver the services' requirement and project outcomes, details of the proposals can be shared more widely with the four local communities.

The formal consultation at all four sites will be part of the Planning Application process and fundamental to the next steps in the project.

## **7. Equalities Implication**

- 7.1 When considering proposals placed before Members it is important that they are fully aware of, and have themselves rigorously considered the equality implications of the decision that they are making.

- 7.2 Rigorous consideration will ensure proper appreciation of any potential impact of that decision on the County Council's statutory obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. As a minimum this requires decision makers to read and carefully consider the content of any Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) produced by officers.

- 7.3 The Equality Act 2010 requires the County Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act; (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it and (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.

An Equalities Impact Assessment for each site will be developed as part of the next stage of the project. This document will indicate possible areas of differential impact on groups with protected characteristics, and measures taken to mitigate this.

## **8. Next Steps**

- 8.1 Public Health, Localism and Libraries Cabinet Panel will be asked to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

That Public Health, Localism and Libraries Cabinet Panel recommends to Cabinet that the project proceeds to co-locate the libraries at Redbourn, Sawbridgeworth and Wheathampstead with the relevant retained fire station.

In relation to the project at Buntingford, that Cabinet Panel recommends to Cabinet that the Library Service consider '*Buntingford in Transition's*' submission to keep the library in its current site, prior to taking a decision.

That Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue and the Library service share with the local Buntingford community the details of the proposal to locate the library with the retained fire station. Exhibiting the co-location proposals alongside *Buntingford in Transition's* plans.

To return to Public Health, Localism and Libraries Cabinet Panel in the Summer with the final recommendation on re providing or relocating Buntingford Library.

- 8.2 The next steps for the project if members agree are:
- Formal consultation at Redbourn, Sawbridgeworth and Wheathampstead sites as part of the Planning Application process.
  - Liaising with local partners to share the details of the schemes.
  - Transport Statements developed further for all four sites.
  - Develop the internal layouts for the co-locations and particularly the library fit out.
  - Consider *Buntingford in Transition's* alternative plan for the redevelopment of the current library building.
  - Engage with the local Buntingford community to share the proposals to co-locate the Library and Fire Station.

This paper will be also be presented Resources & Performance Cabinet Panel for their information and comment.

## **9. Conclusions**

- 9.1 The feasibility work has shown that the opportunity to co-locate four libraries with retained Fire Stations at Buntingford, Redbourn, Sawbridgeworth and Wheathampstead, is feasible in terms of meeting the services' requirements and project objectives.
- 9.2 To date the details of the projects' proposals around library and fire station co-locations have not been shared with local communities in any depth. This is the next stage of the project now it is clear that the co-locations are feasible.
- 9.3 Buntingford in Transition have objected to potential of Buntingford Library moving from the High Street and they have submitted their own proposal to improve the Library in its current location. The County Council needs time to consider Buntingford in Transition's proposal, as well as share with the local community the details of the opportunity to enhance library facilities in Buntingford through co-locating the library with the fire station.