

Crossgates Library and Community Hub Provision

Date: 29 January 2024

Report of: Chief Officer Community Hubs, Welfare & Business Support

Report to: Director of Communities Housing and Environment

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief Summary

It is proposed the Farm Rd site (LS15 8DT) and former building in which the local Leeds City Council library operated, is to be declared surplus to the requirements of the service due to the mounting refurbishment and maintenance costs exceeding Leeds City Council's available budget. To ensure a library provision continues to support the local community, the existing library provision has temporarily relocated to the nearby Crossgates Shopping Centre.

Leeds City Council's Community Hub & Libraries Service has undertaken a Needs Assessment (Appendix A of this report) to inform the future direction of the library provision in the Crossgates area of Leeds. The assessment considers the needs of the community and relevant demographic groups to ensure Leeds City Council provides a service that is compliant with statutory obligations and ensures financial resilience. The Needs Assessment has identified that whilst the current service provision within the Crossgates Shopping Centre meets the statutory need of local residents, further enhancements would support the delivery of additional services found in Community Hub across Leeds.

This report will set out details of the current position and necessary recommendations to the Director of Communities Housing & Environment to ensure the service will continue to meet the statutory duties and the offer is financially sustainable and fit for the future.

Recommendations

The Director of Communities Housing & Environment is requested to:

- a) Note the findings of Community Hub & Libraries Service 'Needs Assessment' which will inform the future direction of the library provision in the Crossgates area of Leeds.
- b) Instruct City Development to negotiate and enter into an extended lease for space within Crossgates Shopping Centre, and further develop the existing library provision to support a Community Hub facility.
- c) Declare the Farm Rd site (LS15 8DT) surplus to the requirements of the service.

What is this report about?

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide background information and detail to the Director of Communities Housing & Environment and seek approval to declare the Farm Rd site (LS15 8DT) surplus to the requirements of the service. This decision is informed by the findings of the Needs Assessment which will help define the permanent library provision local to the area.
- 2 The Executive Board has received a number of reports highlighting the development and roll-out of the 'Community Hub model' across the city since 2014. In March 2019 a report was issued to the Executive Board which highlighted the need to develop a further Phase 3 (years 2 & 3) business case to cover the remaining 'One Stop' centres, libraries, and housing offices across the rest of the city. The development of the Crossgates Community Hub was noted in the report.
- 3 The proposal sought to co-locate a general medical practice (GP) into the existing library building and ultimately blend a community hub & library, local GP, and credit union facilities 'under one roof'. The business case for the development included prudential borrowing to meet the likely development costs, supported by financial contributions from the GP via a long lease.
- 4 With construction costs persistently rising across the sector, the proposed scheme was estimated at £2.9m in June 2022. Given the escalating costs, financially it was not possible for the GP to co-locate as the level of rent that could be justified was insufficient to support the amount of prudential borrowing required. Added to this pressure, sporadic acts of vandalism and arson rendered the building and site beyond the financial capability of Leeds City Council to redevelop alone.
- 5 During the early stages of the proposed design development, the library provision relocated on a temporary basis into the Crossgates Shopping Centre to ensure a library service was maintained and accessible to the local community. This was facilitated by a short-term lease agreement with the Crossgates Shopping Centre Management, and continues to support the local community access a library provision within the area.
- 6 A Needs Assessment has been undertaken to review the current provision within the Crossgates Shopping Centre, alongside comments and issues raised by members of the public. The assessment has shown that the current library continues to meet the statutory need of local residents and is both comprehensive and well used by the community. Recommendations within the assessment does however support further investment to enhance the current library offer and include services found within community hubs across Leeds. On this basis it is proposed the Community Hub & Libraries Service enter into a longer-term agreement with the Crossgates Shopping Centre to enable further development of the current library offer. In addition, given the cost of bringing the Farm Road building back into operational use and the council's current financial challenges, the Community Hub and Library Service will not be seeking to further develop the Farm Rd site (LS15 8DT), and it is proposed to declare the building surplus to the requirements of the service.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 7 Over recent years Leeds City Council has invested in the community hub and library provision with the aim of integrating frontline services to ensure effective delivery to local communities. This has continued to be the case despite increasing funding cuts that has severely impacted budgets. The current service provision operating temporarily from the Crossgates Shopping Centre meets the statutory needs of local residents through readily accessible resources, information and guidance that improves reading & literacy, develop skills, and promote health & wellbeing in a

safe community space. The library will continue to support the community in this location on a permanent basis, developed in accordance with the appended Needs Assessment.

- 8 Declaring the Farm Rd site surplus to the requirements of the service will reduce the mounting financial costs associated with the maintenance and operation of that site.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing Inclusive Growth Zero Carbon

- 9 Leeds City Council's current financial challenge necessitates a radical rethink of how vital services are to be delivered in order to protect frontline library services. Maintaining a library provision in the Crossgates Shopping Centre, that is accessible to the local community, will play an important role in supporting education and literacy. It will also support the ability to access resources, information, and guidance to develop skills and promote health & wellbeing.

- 10 The Community Hub and Library Services has undertaken a 'Needs Assessment' in the area to ensure that the relocated library will:

- Meets legal requirements.
- Is shaped by local needs.
- That the Council makes decisions informed by evidence.
- Focuses on public benefit and deliver a high-quality user experience.
- Supports delivery of consistent England-wide core offers.
- Promotes partnership working, innovation and enterprise.
- Uses public funds effectively and efficiently.

- 11 The Farm Rd site is burdened with significant backlog maintenance pressures and substantial investment is needed to ensure any future LCC service operating from the site will meet modern standards. Declaring the Farm Rd site surplus to the requirements of the service and relocating the library provision to a more sustainable location will support Leeds City Council's commitment to 'Zero Carbon'.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: Crossgates & Whinmoor

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

- 12 Ward Members, the Executive Member for Communities and the Executive Member for Resources have been consulted on the proposal. As noted within this report, continued engagement with the local community will help shape the future library provision in the area. As the permanent Crossgates library proposal matures through detailed design and development, briefing notes and appropriate presentations will keep all ward members updated.

What are the resource implications?

- 13 The Council's financial challenges has been reported to Executive Board and Full Council. Given the Council's serious financial position there are a number of service reviews underway which will inform the way that the Council delivers services in the future. Reducing the size of the Councils operational property portfolio is a key part of the budget action plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, which focuses on releasing properties with high levels of both backlog maintenance pressures and significant financial investment to meet modern standards and be fit for purpose.

14 The Needs Assessment undertaken has confirmed that whilst the temporary library provision in the Crossgates Shopping Centre meets the statutory need of local residents, further investment will enhance the offer and support additional services found in Community Hubs across Leeds. This is anticipated to be fully funded from the existing Community Hub Programme budget. Officers responsible for the delivery of the Community Hub Programme will manage the delivery costs to ensure they remain within the existing and available budget. The operational costs associated with the Library and Community Hub provision in the Crossgates Shopping Centre will be met from the services revenue budget.

15 Declaring the Farm Road building surplus to service requirements will allow the building to be disposed saving revenue costs associated with the running of the building and a Capital Receipt to be generated from the sale of the property.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

16 The key risks associated with this proposal are:

- ***Delivery of the investment identified in the Needs Assessment exceeds the existing Community Hub Development Programme budget.*** The current budget provision has been informed by the details of a recent feasibility study and the delivery of similar schemes completed elsewhere in the city forming part of the wider programme.

Experienced project management resource from City Development will be tasked with ensuring any remedial works required remains within the predetermined risk tolerances and budget threshold. An appropriate risk register will manage all known risks and escalation is via the Community Hub Development Board.

What are the legal implications?

17 Consultation with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has identified there are no legal implications arising from this proposal. The requirements for a 'Needs Assessment' in this instance is deemed as best practice and not a legal requirement.

Options, timescales and measuring success.

What other options were considered?

18 Further options were explored to retain the Farm Rd site but the required budget to resolve the existing challenges with the building and wider site, significantly exceeds the available budget. Temporarily relocating the library provision into the Crossgates Shopping Centre has maintained a local library provision for the community that meets the statutory requirements. The findings within the Needs Assessment will steer the future library provision in the area.

How will success be measured?

19 Success of the long term Crossgates library premises will be measured through the monitoring of:

- Membership.
- Book issues.
- Public PC access.
- Customer feedback.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

20 With immediate effect, the Community Hub and Library Services will not be seeking to further develop the Farm Rd site (LS15 8DT). This report is seeking approval from the Director of Communities Housing & Environment to declare the Farm Rd site (LS15 8DT) surplus to the requirements of the service.

21 The long-term delivery of the Library and Community Hub facility in the Crossgates Shopping Centre will be brought forward in the 2024/25 financial year.

Background papers

- Appendix A – Crossgates Library Needs Assessment
- Appendix B - Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Assessment (EDCI) .