

**Decision Maker:** **PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR RENEWAL, RECREATION AND HOUSING**

**Date:** **For Pre-Decision Scrutiny by the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on 16 November 2022**

**Decision Type:** Non-Urgent                      Executive                      Non-Key

**Title:** **FUTURE OF COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRES/OUTREACH SERVICE**

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**Chief Officer:** Sara Bowrey, Director of Housing, Planning and Regeneration

**Ward:** Mottingham; St Paul's Cray;

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1. Reason for decision/report and options

- 1.1 Due to a number of factors, mainly problems with the current buildings, the future of the outreach services currently provided by two community resource centre facilities at Mottingham and Cotmandene has been under review.
- 1.2 The report asks the Portfolio Holder to agree to the retention of the service, and its relocation into different buildings, subject to further research.
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**2. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 Members of the Renewal, Recreation & Housing Policy, Development and Scrutiny Committee are asked to review the content of this report and provide comments to the Portfolio Holder.
- 2.2 That the Portfolio Holder for Renewal Recreation and Housing be recommended to agree that this valuable community service should be retained and the following work undertaken by officers: research on potential options for the relocation of the service within the St Paul's Cray and Mottingham areas; research on the user patterns in the two communities, soundings from users and non-users, and investigation of the costs of moving to other buildings.

Following this a decision report will be taken to the Executive in February 2023.

## Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: The proposed retention of the service has no negative impacts. There is potential for improvement depending on where the service moves to and the opportunities for partnership working.
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## Transformation Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy
  2. Making Bromley Even Better Priority
    - (2) For adults and older people to enjoy fulfilled and successful lives in Bromley, ageing well, retaining independence and making choices.
    - (4) For residents to live responsibly and prosper in a safe, clean and green environment great for today and a sustainable future.
    - (5) To manage our resources well, providing value for money, and efficient and effective services for Bromley's residents.Not Applicable:
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## Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Cost of moving to other buildings to be explored
  2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Community Resource Centres
  4. Total current budget for this head: £207k
  5. Source of funding: Existing controllable revenue budget 2022/23
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## Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 3.62FTE
  2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 135 hours
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## Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-Statutory - Government Guidance:
  2. Call-in: Applicable: Portfolio Holder decision.
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## Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: None
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## Property

1. Summary of Property Implications: The Mottingham Learning Shop lease is coming to an end and therefore a new location needs to be identified for this service. Both the Mottingham and Cotmandene buildings have suffered from flooding. The Cotmandene Community Resource Centre building is currently closed due to damage from a sewage leak.
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## Carbon Reduction and Social Value

1. Summary of Carbon Reduction/Sustainability Implications: None
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## Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users or customers (current and projected): This is a frontline service. The service is still recovering from the impact of Covid-19 however figures from January – July 2022 suggest that this year is on track to deal with 41,500 enquiries, the highest level ever recorded this year.
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## Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Yes
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Ward Councillors have indicated their support for retaining this service which supports the most vulnerable residents and for exploring relocation options within their current communities. They understand the reasons why a move from both of the current sites is needed and accept the need to seek alternative accommodation for the service in order to replicate and improve the range of services on offer. Councillor Price-St Pauls Cray Ward welcomes a review that looks at improving the social value of the centres in the right community setting. Mottingham Ward Councillors have expressed a preference for finding alternative premises on the Mottingham Estate where the current service is located.

### 3. COMMENTARY

#### Background

- 3.1. The Community Resource Centres are also known as the 'Learning Resource Centres' and the 'Learning Shops'. The service is currently delivered from two permanent sites in the Borough, positioned in areas of high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. The centres are:
- Cotmandene Community Resource Centre (CCRC)
  - The Mottingham Community and Learning Shop (MCLS)
- 3.2. The service offers a unique triage service in the heart of the community where customers can seek advice and guidance on any issue. The informal approach generates trust and removes barriers. Customers can 'drop in' without an appointment or filling in a form and receive on the spot help or a referral to other services. The service aims to create better life outcomes for Bromley residents by providing support on mental health, loneliness, and social isolation, specifically with access to benefit, job-seeking, and housing advice, as well as training and education. The Resource Centres are preventative services, that reduce the likelihood of support being required from other Council departments.
- 3.3. The two buildings the service is located in are no longer fit for purpose and there is a time pressure to make decisions on the future of the Resource Centres. The Mottingham site is due for lease renewal in February and with significantly increased rent that makes the site unviable, with the landlord now having put the property to market. At any time the Council could now be asked to vacate the Mottingham site. Additionally, both buildings have ongoing maintenance issues with Cotmandene frequently subjected to flooding due to the poor state of the flats above. Mottingham has also been impacted from flooding from the flats above including a serious flood at the time of writing this report which has caused significant damage to the IT suite and one of the classrooms. Cotmandene recently suffered a sewage leak which has led to the service temporarily moving to St Paul's Cray library whilst repairs are made.

#### Options for the future of the service

- 3.4. As part of the Council's transformation programme the future of the Resource Centres has been considered with, given the ongoing building problems and the lease ending at Mottingham, two options identified:
- Option 1 – Close the service and the centres
- Option 2 – Move the service to other buildings in the St Pauls Cray and Mottingham areas.
- This report reviews the two options and concludes that Option 2, moving the service to other buildings in the St Pauls Cray and Mottingham areas would be the preferred option. It is a valuable preventative service which is partly successful because of being located in areas of the borough where the communities particularly need support.

#### Option 1 - Close the service and the centres

- 3.5. Close the Cotmandene and Mottingham sites and either run the service online and by phone only or stop the service completely and make the staff redundant. This would have a negative impact on the disadvantaged communities the centres serve. The staff are extremely knowledgeable and provide significant support to users. By being based within the communities they serve the centres are extremely accessible and inclusive with early intervention rates leading to better outcomes. Moving the service online and by phone would not serve the communities as effectively. Many users find it easier to communicate face to face for a number of reasons including disabilities or where English is not their first language.

- 3.6. Closing this front-line service would lead to more enquiries and support being required by other Council services such as the housing team. There is currently increased demand at the moment when residents in disadvantaged communities are struggling with rising energy costs and increased housing costs meaning the support that this service provides to residents is more valuable than ever.

#### Option 2 – Move the service to other buildings in the Mottingham and St Paul’s Cray areas

- 3.7. This option would retain the service by moving it into other buildings. There are expected to be a number of potential buildings in the two areas that could be suitable for the relocation. It is anticipated that there will be no redundancies as the service will continue.
- 3.8. These options need to be investigated, including the cost and practical implications of running the service to ensure that the optimal relocation is determined. Research will need to be undertaken to inform this including soundings from users and non-users. This will include exit surveys carried out by staff as customers leave the centres capturing their patterns of use along with levels of satisfaction with the current service including existing opening hours. Use of any other local services will be captured to establish the extent of any overlap with other services within the community including other council services such as adult social care support and housing advice and options. Research methods will include small informal focus groups for service users at each centre and will extend to residents outside of the centres to gain an insight into the knowledge and reach of the service amongst non-users.

#### Overview of current service

- 3.9. The current service is delivered from two permanent sites in Cotmandene and Mottingham. The sites are positioned in busy shopping parades in the heart of communities where there is higher unemployment and social deprivation than other areas of the Borough. The opening hours for both centres are Monday-Thursday 9.00am-1.00pm and 2.00-4.00pm with no coverage at lunchtime. Recently each centre moved to an appointment only service one day a week. The locations of these services in the heart of these communities is crucial to its success.
- 3.10. Staffing levels have reduced over the years, the current service is delivered by 5 staff (3.62 FTE) including a centre manager who is responsible for, and moves across, both sites. The service is currently carrying a 0.5 FTE deputy manager vacancy of 14 hours per week. Both centres close over Christmas and at alternative weeks over Easter. Recently, cover staff (namely required for illness or annual leave) have been sourced from the wider Culture and Regeneration division, but this is not sustainable longer term. Both centres have a strong volunteer base who run workshops and community groups, albeit Covid-19 has affected levels of volunteering.
- 3.11. Staff have a wide knowledge base and good relationships with the community. Many of their customers are vulnerable, experiencing hardship or suffering from mental health issues. Frontline work is challenging and unpredictable. Customers can become distressed or angry when seeking help due to their personal circumstances.
- 3.12. The Community Outreach service has developed a trusted place in both the Mottingham and Cotmandene communities. It offers a ‘one-stop-shop’ for information, advice and guidance and is a hub for community activities. A key role of the outreach centres is signposting customers to other services. The centres are established in the community as a destination for information about a wide variety of issues. It is often the first step to getting help and often customers are unsure about what type of support they need or what is available to them.
- 3.13. Many of the daily interactions with customers are short as people seek advice as to which services they require. Other customers require more time and consultations can open a

complex range of interlocking issues that requires ongoing support. Due to social isolation many customers benefit from being able to regularly talk about their issues.

3.14. Community outreach is a preventative service which means the positive outcomes are difficult to quantify because they offer residents multiple opportunities to improve their circumstances. They aim to help customers improve their lives and prevent more difficult situations developing which may require increased support from council services. The service is good at taking opportunities to access funding and special schemes, such as a recent access to funded sim cards for people job hunting.

3.15. Core Services currently provided include the following

- Information, Advice and Guidance (drop-in advice or appointments)
- Signposting and referrals to other services
- Computer suite – PCs and printing
- Life skills – managing change, building a future, and encouraging people to seek help and support.
- Support with job-seeking including a free work club to support the journey back to employment.
- Benefits advice – provides a simplicity and dignity to the process of claiming benefits.
- Outreach surgeries via partner organisations e.g., Citizens Advice Bureau, Police, Housing.
- Community Groups including Coffee Morning, Cray Creative Art Group, Listening Ear Mental Health Support Group, Tea with IT.
- Events which combat social isolation and promote health and wellbeing.
- Adult education classes held in the community.
- Support with mental health issues often caused by isolation, loneliness, illness, additional needs, long-term poverty, or unemployment.
- Freephone services for housing and benefits support.
- Prevention of worse outcomes for residents experiencing difficulties.

### Service statistics

3.16. Table 1 compares statistics for the number of clients seeking information, advice, and guidance (IAG) At the Centres from 2012. Figures vary peaking to over 40,000 faces to face enquiries at both Centres in 2017, falling slightly in 2018 before reaching the highest total in 2019 before being impacted by the pandemic when figures fell by 62%.

Table 1: IAG Enquiry statistics

Number of annual IAG Enquiries		
Year	Total IAG	Difference
2012	19,796	n/a
2013	26,631	+35.5
2014	31,415	+17.9
2015	29,949	-4.6
2016	27,860	-6.9%
2017	40,031	+43.6%
2018	38,929	-2.75%
2019	40,984	+5.2%
2020	14,440	-62.3%
2021	27,541	+39%

- 3.17. The service is still recovering from the impact of Covid-19 however figures from January – July 2022 suggest that this year is on track to deal with 41,500 enquiries, the highest level ever recorded. This will mean that on average each member of the team is dealing with 180 enquiries a week based on a 46-week working year. There is a demonstrable need for this service.
- 3.18. The service has recently started using social media to support the local communities. In 2021 Facebook and Twitter accounts received 104,000 views, and so far in 2022 they have already received 114,000 views with local people using their social media channels as an additional way to access the information they need.

#### Building condition

- 3.19. Cotmandene Community Resource Centre (CCRC) is situated at 64 Cotmandene Crescent and is Council owned. The Mottingham Community and Learning Shop (MCLS) occupies premises at 1-2 Cranley Parade which is leased from L&C Investments Ltd. The current lease expired on 25th February 2022. Negotiations to extend the lease failed as the landlord is pushing for a higher rent and therefore it will be unviable to remain at this site after this time.
- 3.20. Both buildings are in an unsatisfactory state of repair. The centres have suffered from a series of floods resulting in extensive damage to both buildings especially the IT suites which had to be completely refurbished. There have been ventilation issues which delayed the re-opening of the centres during the pandemic.. These buildings are no longer fit for purpose.
- 3.21. In September 2022 Cotmandene was temporarily relocated in St Pauls Cray Library due to damage from a sewage leak and remains there at the time of writing while the site is restored to its previous condition. The Mottingham site also recently flooded due to pipe work in the flats above and many of the rooms are currently out of action.

#### **4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN**

- 4.1 The current outreach service serves two communities in the Borough in Mottingham and St Pauls Cray areas. The recommendation is that the service is retained with no negative impact on vulnerable adults or children.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The current controllable budgets for the two community resource centres are as follows:

	Mottingham (£'000)	Cotmandene (£'000)	Total (£'000)
Staffing	79	63	142
Premises	40	17	57
Supplies & Services	11	14	25
Gross Expenditure	130	94	224
Income	cr 4	cr 13	cr 17
Net Expenditure	126	81	207

- 5.2 For Option 1, which involves the closure of both sites, budget savings of up to £207k could be achieved, although the actual saving will depend on the number of staff retained for any future online/phone service provision. In addition, the Cotmandene site would be released, and if not sold to generate a capital receipt, a new tenant could be sought and generate in additional annual rental income, which could be £25k a year.
- 5.3 Under Option 2, any actual saving or cost will depend on the outcome of the research and which buildings the service is recommended to move to. This option could avoid future maintenance costs including any backlog maintenance liabilities, however there could also be some initial cost of investment.
- 5.4 There are therefore a number of costs that need to be determined and finalised for the business case that will be required for the decision report to the Executive in February 2023.

## **6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are 5 part time staff which 3.69 FTE staff currently employed across both Centres, the proposals for a reorganisation of the outreach service potentially do not have redundancy implications as the current staffing levels will be retained.
- 6.2 Any staffing implications arising from the future recommendation will need to be carefully planned for and managed in accordance with Council policies and procedures and with due regard for the existing framework of employment law.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. The terms of reference of this Committee include for it “reviewing working with partner organisations and groups including local businesses, business support agencies, sub-regional and regional organisations” and “...receiving reports and making recommendations on performance monitoring of services falling within the remit of this portfolio which would include town centre management libraries, leisure and culture, including theatres, special needs/supported housing.”
- 7.2. There is no statutory duty on the Council to provide these specific services but, in support of its Social Care functions, the Council has an implied legal power to secure the provision of these outreach services.

## **8. PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The two existing properties both have regular problems, particularly with flooding. Both sites are currently damaged with the Cotmandene site not suitable for use due to a sewage leak. The Mottingham site is partially open following a leak from the flat upstairs which has damaged the IT suite and classroom.
- 8.2 The Mottingham lease comes to an end in February and Property have not been able to successfully renew the lease at a reasonable level of rent. The current tenant at will status means the service could have to vacate the premises at short notice

## **9. CUSTOMER IMPACT**

- 9.1 There are currently an estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Latest 2021 population figures for Bromley show there are 330,000 people living in the borough. In terms of service use. There were 40,984 Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) enquiries to Community Outreach Centres in 2019/20 before COVID-19 closures.

## **10. WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS**

- 10.1. The report was circulated to both the St Pauls Cray Ward Councillors and Mottingham Ward Councillors for comment and review. Separate briefing meetings took place with Councillor Price and Councillors Cartwright and Rowlands to discuss the report.
- 10.2. The following comments have been received from St Pauls Cray Ward Councillor Chris Price: The resource centres are of extreme value to many people in the local communities. I welcome a review that looks at the social value of the centres, has a community first approach to the development of the offer and ensures the right community setting for delivery for the service and partners.
- 10.3. Mottingham Ward Councillors David Cartwright and Will Rowlands have also provided their comments: We ask that the Committee notes that it is crucial for those vulnerable adults and children who live in/on the Mottingham Estate, particularly those in the area formally designated as an 'area of social and economic deprivation', have easy access to the wide variety of valuable and much-used advice and assistance available at the MCLS. Whilst we, as Ward Councillors, understand the reasons why a move from the current premises is necessary and accept the need to look for alternative accommodation to protect the future of the MCLS, it is imperative that the service remains situated within the central area of the Estate, for ease of access by the many residents who make regular use of its facilities

<b>Non-Applicable Headings:</b>	Carbon reduction/social value implications; transformation and policy implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	N/A