

Fairer Together Directorate

222 Upper Street, N1 1XR

Report of Executive Member for Homes and Communities

Meeting of Voluntary and Community Sector Committee

Date: July 2022

Ward(s): Caledonian

## Jean Stokes Community Centre: Allocation of Office Space to Voluntary Sector Organisations

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1. Jean Stokes Community Centre, a council-managed estate-based community facility in Caledonian ward, is being improved through investment from the council and the GLA as part of the [‘We are Cally’](#) programme. The works will bring currently disused parts of the building back into use, creating improved spaces for the delivery of a range of activities and services for local people, and offices for voluntary and community sector organisations.
- 1.2. The Communities team have run an open and competitive process to identify voluntary sector organisations to be based in the improved facility when it reopens in September 2022, who will contribute to meeting the needs and priorities of residents of Bemerton Estate and the wider Cally area. This paper outlines the assessment panel’s recommendations to license office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre to four voluntary sector organisations.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To note the intention to award licenses to the following voluntary sector organisations for use of office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre from September 2022:
  - Age UK Islington
  - Asperger London Area Group - The Autism Hub Camden and Islington
  - Help on Your Doorstep
  - Stuart Low Trust

## Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.2. The four organisations provide services which help improve outcomes for Islington residents. They will contribute to an engaging offer from the community centre for residents of Bemerton Estate and the surrounding area. This includes targeted services that help when people need it, such as peer support, one-to-one support and casework. It also includes activities available to all residents that bring people together with a shared purpose, for example arts and creative activities, exercise and wellbeing sessions, social activities and community meals.
- 2.3. The recommended organisations will help meet aspirations for the area laid out in the [We are Cally Community Plan](#). Collectively, the four organisations contribute to all five key thematic areas of the We are Cally Community Plan.
- 2.4. The organisations will help tackle inequality, providing services for residents with protected characteristics and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. This includes specialist support to older residents, those experiencing mental and physical health difficulties, and neuro-diverse adults.
- 2.5. All recommended organisations have committed to working collaboratively with residents, reaching and involving the Cally's diverse communities, as well as with other organisations based in the centre, the council and other local partners. This supports the collaborative, partnership approach central to We are Cally and the Fairer Together programme.

## 3. Background

### We are Cally

- 3.1. In December 2018, the council was awarded £350,000 from the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund, matched by £1m of council investment, for a place-based demonstrator project in the Caledonian Road area. The 'We are Cally' programme is reviewing the use and design of public assets in Cally to support key outcomes for Islington's communities, primarily around employability, skills, connectedness and cohesion.
- 3.2. Improvements to two council buildings in the area, West Library and Jean Stokes Community Centre, will create modern and engaging public spaces that provide civic space, encourage connectedness and community engagement, and provide services that residents need.
- 3.3. The We are Cally programme is framed by the We are Cally Community Plan 2021-24, which lays out the aspirations of people living and working in Cally

across five key thematic areas, and the actions that will be taken to realise these. The plan provides detail on how partners will work together to:

- create more opportunities for children, young people and families so that young people in Cally get the best possible start in life
- boost the local economy by supporting businesses and helping people into training and work
- strengthen community connections and a shared sense of belonging
- make Cally a greener place, with attractive open spaces that are used by everyone
- improve health and wellbeing and tackle poor air quality

### **Jean Stokes Community Centre**

- 3.4. Jean Stokes Community Centre is a council-managed Housing Revenue Account facility located on the Bemerton Estate in Caledonian ward, south Islington. It is a resource for residents of the estate and surrounding areas.
- 3.5. Improvements to the centre as part of the We are Cally programme are bringing disused space back into use and improving accessibility, in order to create a vibrant centre which is a hub for community life. The centre will be an important part of the social infrastructure of the Cally – the physical spaces, networks and relationships that support the community to be connected, resilient and inclusive.
- 3.6. The redesign of the community centre has been informed by extensive engagement with residents and with organisations and services who are current or potential users of the space. This has clearly demonstrated that residents and local organisations want Jean Stokes Community Centre to become a drop-in community centre with an enhanced programme of activities and events.
- 3.7. The improved Jean Stokes Community Centre will provide office space at below market rent exclusively for local voluntary sector groups.

### **Premises Allocation Process**

- 3.8. One of the ways in which the council supports Islington's voluntary and community sector is through the provision of office and delivery space below market rates. This is intended to support not-for-profit organisations, defined as organisations that reinvest any surpluses to further social, cultural or environmental objectives.
- 3.9. An open and competitive applications process was run to identify suitable tenants to occupy the available office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre.
- 3.10. Applications for use of office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre were assessed against minimum standards, suitability and award criteria. Organisations were asked to demonstrate how they would address priorities of the We are Cally

Community Plan; contribute to an engaging programme of services and activities that improves outcomes for residents of Bemerton Estate and the wider area; and work collaboratively with residents, and with the council and other local partners.

## 4. Implications

### 4.1. Financial Implications

- 4.1.1. The Housing Revenue Account has allowed for £900,000 of investment for improvement works at Jean Stokes Community Centre. Works are on-going with a total of £295,000 spent as of 2021/22.
- 4.1.2. One of the ways the council supports the voluntary section is to provide office and delivery space at below market rate when a suitable premises becomes available. This is intended to support not-for-profit organisations, defined as organisations that reinvest any surpluses to further social, cultural or environmental objectives. Given the demand for affordable office space in the borough, allocations processes are run on an open and competitive basis.
- 4.1.3. In order to allocate office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre, all four organisations completed an application as part of an open process. Part of that process was to demonstrate their financial viability and a commitment to paying all staff the London Living Wage as a minimum. All organisations demonstrated in their application the social value they will provide in order to offset forgone rent; monitoring of social value will be part of the annual monitoring which is a condition of the license to occupy.
- 4.1.4. Each of the four organisations recommended currently receive funding from the council either through commissioning or core grant funding. Offering rent at below market value allows more of that funding to be used in delivering services and activities to benefit residents.
- 4.1.5. The rent charged to voluntary sector organisations will contribute to meeting the overall running costs of the community centre, which is being run on a not-for-profit basis.

### 4.2. Legal Implications

- 4.2.1. The Council has power to provide office space under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, which provision confers a general power of competence on the Council to do anything for the benefit of its area or person's resident or present in its area.
- 4.2.2. Officers should ensure that each of the successful organisations signs the necessary Licence to Occupy (or Tenancy At Will, as the case may be); Legal Services Property Team should be consulted for the relevant documents to be prepared.
- 4.2.3. As this is a land transaction and of relatively low financial value it is not affected by the Procurement Regulations or the Concession Contracts Regulations.
- 4.2.4. Assuming the selection process was fair and transparent there should be no risk of a successful legal challenge by any unsuccessful applicant.

- 4.2.5. The discount on market rates for the occupation fees is not a subsidy as the discount does not affect international trade; accordingly the Subsidy Control regulations are not applicable.
- 4.2.6. The grant of the Licenses (or Tenancies At Will) will need to be formally authorised in writing by the Corporate Director (or such other officer invested with the requisite delegated authority to do so).

#### 4.3. **Environmental Implications and contribution to achieving a net zero carbon Islington by 2030**

- 4.3.1. The redesign of Jean Stokes Community Centre and the development of the lower ground floor to provide work space has been undertaken with regard for environmental implications and the goal of achieving a net zero Islington by 2030.
- 4.3.2. The waste management plan for the centre has been developed with the Waste and Recycling team in order to minimise the amount of residual waste.
- 4.3.3. There is no car parking provided at Jean Stokes Community Centre, and staff and residents are encouraged to walk, cycle or use public transport to get to the centre. There are good public transport links in the area and cycling parking is being provided as part of the redesign.
- 4.3.4. There are carbon and environmental impacts associated with the work of the four recommended organisations at the community centre, including the use of energy, water and consumable materials. However, some activities provided will have positive environmental impact, for example communal meals, gardening and growing activities and provision of advice to residents on energy efficiency at home.

#### 4.4. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 4.4.1. The council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and to advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations, between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it (section 149 Equality Act 2010). The council has a duty to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages, take steps to meet needs, in particular steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, and encourage people to participate in public life. The council must have due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.
- 4.4.2. An Equalities Impact Assessment is not required in relation to this report, as the recommendation will have a beneficial and desirable impact on people with protected characteristics and those who may be at a disadvantage in accessing opportunities or services, such as people from low-income households.
- 4.4.3. The four organisations recommended to occupy office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre provide services for residents with protected characteristics and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, including specialist support to older residents, those experiencing mental and physical health difficulties, and

neuro-diverse adults. Having these organisations based at Jean Stokes Community Centre will make it easier for residents living in and near Caledonian ward, including those with disabilities and other barriers to accessing services, to access services in their local area.

## 5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 5.1. The committee is asked to note the intention to award licenses to Age UK, Help on Your Doorstep, Autism Hub and the Stuart Low Trust for use of office space at Jean Stokes Community Centre from September 2022. The four organisations will help realise aspirations for the area laid out in the We are Cally community plan, contribute to an offer of community activities and services that improves the quality of life of local residents, and help tackle inequality.

### Appendices:

- None

### Background papers:

- None

### Final report clearance:

Signed by:



**Executive Member for Community Development**

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