

Joint Area Committee - North – 22nd July 2009

14. Langport Local Information Centre and Community Office (Executive Decision) (Excepted Business)

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Purpose of the Report

To update members on the current operating position of the Langport Community Office & Information Centre and seek approval for a financial contribution towards additional costs for the current financial year.

Recommendations

- (1) Members to note the current operating position of the Langport Community Office & Information Centre.
- (2) To approve a grant to Langport Town Council towards the cost of re-locating and equipping the Langport Local Information Centre and Community Office from the Area North Capital Programme – Local Priorities allocation. Subject to SSDC Community grants and the following special conditions:
 - (a) Langport Town Council to establish a working group or sub-committee to monitor and support the further development of the community office and Local Information Centre, and invite the project manager of LINKS and the Local Information Centre to join.
 - (b) A revised business plan, including the development of the Local Information Centre services to be submitted to SSDC by 30th November 2009.
 - (c) The working group to oversee the existing SSDC service level agreement for the Local Information Centre and generally support and promote the LIC volunteers.
 - (d) Grant payments must be viewed as restricted funds, to the Langport Community Office and presented as such in the Town Council / Town Trust accounts.
 - (e) That in the event of a decision by Langport Town Council to rescind the lease of the Community Office, SSDC is notified in writing and reserves the right to reclaim all or part of this grant.

Background

The Langport Community Office opened in April 2004, as a valuable new focal point for both residents and visitors to the area, leased by the Langport Area Development Trust. Situated in a prime location in Bow Street, the office provides a base for the Local Information Centre and the Links Community Transport Service.

In November 2008, following an application for financial support for the office due to the precarious financial position of the Langport Area Development Trust (LADT), the Area North Committee awarded a grant of £4,000. This was subject to a set of special conditions, placing control of the office budget in the hands of a joint working group, including LADT, the two local councils and a representative of Area North (Cllr Tony Canvin).

As a networked Local Information Centre, SSDC also provides a grant of £500 per annum currently to LADT, under a service agreement for visitors services, although there is some doubt whether this funding will continue.

An update report was made to the Joint Area Committee in March 2009, at which time it was confirmed that the emergency measures put in place had proved fruitful, with a range of cost reduction and income generation measures put in place or planned. Members highlighted the importance of a well-managed information centre to maximise the tourism potential of the town, and indicated a preference for public access to SSDC from a central town location.

Progress since March 2009.

The working group authorised a part payment of the grant of £1,000 (from £4,000) which was paid to Langport Area Development Trust on 19 March 09. £3000 remains allocated but not paid. Due to a variety of actions, supported by the working group, the annual operating budget has been reduced with limited impact on the services provided.

The working group last met on 28 May 09 to discuss Langport Town Council's interest in taking over the lease for the Community Office. As a result of these discussions it was agreed to move forward with the proposal of relocating to the property next-door with planning permission sought for alterations and improvements to access. Langport Town Council have obtained Change of Use and Listed Building Consent for the new premises. A revised budget has been prepared for 2009-10 to include these one-off costs.

As of 1 June 2009 Langport Area Development Trust has now transferred the lease and running costs of the current Community Office premises to Langport Town Council.

The operation of the Local Information Centre (LIC), including proper support to the LIC co-ordinator and volunteers, had also given cause for concern. This has been addressed, and new volunteers have been attracted. A town leaflet, including advertising space for local traders is underway, and the town council have planned the installation of new town signage, funded by the SSDC Market Towns Vision programme.

The Somerton and Langport Community Transport Service (Links) continues to rent space for its project manager and for public access within the Community Office.

Informal discussion has taken place between the Head of Area Development and the Community Office working group regarding the potential for SSDC staffing presence at the Community Office. This would require further consideration, at a corporate level, to assess the implications for staffing of the Area Office at Kelways, however in principle, the presence of SSDC Customer Advisors is feasible. This will be developed along with the current general review of public access to SSDC services across Area North.

Langport Community Office Budget 2009-10

Expenditure 2009-10	Budget £
Lease/Rent	3800.00
Insurance – Contents & Public Liability	300.00
Office Cleaning	100.00
Heat Light & Power	1100.00
Business Rates	125.00
Telephone	450.00
Equipment replacement & Stationary	500.00
Reserved funds	125.00
Total annual operating costs	6500.00
Capital project - relocation	
Building works for alterations	£4570.00
Sign writing for new office	£300.00
Office Furniture/Display Unit /Carpeting	£2500.00
New Computer/Printer	£1000.00
Total Planned Expenditure 2009-10	£14870.00
Income 2009-10	
SSVCA (Links) Rent & Service charge	2000.00
SSDC tourism grant	500.00
Langport Town Council	1000.00
Huish Episcopi Parish Council	2000.00
Income generated from advertising & sales	1000.00
Additional grants / funding (to be raised)	935.00
Sub Total of Income	£7435.00
Shortfall	- £7435.00
Previous SSDC Grant (awarded Oct 10)	£3000.00
Additional grant request	£4435.00

The total requested is £7435.00 towards a total budget of £14,870.00. This represents a contribution from SSDC of 50%.

Community Grants Assessment Score

The table below shows the grant scoring for this application. In order to be considered, applications need to meet the minimum score of 22, for SSDC funding under the Community Grants policies.

Category	Score	Maximum
A Eligibility	Yes	
B Target Groups	3	6
C Project	4	5
D Capacity of Organisation	13	15
E Financial need	3	5
F Innovation	2	3
Total	25	34

Conclusion

Over the past few months, there has been a significant effort made notably by Langport Town Council to protect – and enhance - the future of the Langport Community Office and Information Centre. The limited potential for income generation and risk of over reliance on grant funding, led this project to be unviable for the Langport Area Development Trust to retain ownership of it, with the local councils being an obvious choice to provide longer term security.

Priority actions for June – December

- Continue to monitor budget against spend on a monthly basis
- Plan for income generation
- Complete building work and relocate office
- Re-launch Local Information Centre
- Establish clear responsibilities for the Local Information Centre, including volunteer support and local links to traders and tourism providers
- Review of staffing presence by SSDC

The planned relocation to the next door premises, provides a reduced annual cost, whilst retaining a prime town centre location.

The opportunity provided is for SSDC to retain close involvement with the further development of the Local Information Centre in particular, and securing the office base for the Langport and Somerton Links service. Another advantage is the opportunity to make better use of this town center facility for public access to services as part of the ongoing review in Area North and across the district.

The grant application is recommended for approval, subject to a series of conditions similar to those applied for the previous application by Langport Area Development Trust. The purpose of these special conditions will be to secure the involvement of local councillors and key users in the future of the community office and to ensure the LIC volunteers are properly supported to develop tourism and visitor services.

Financial Implications

The allocation of £3000 from October 2008, is already included in the current Area North revenue budget.

The Area North Capital programme (approved April 2009) includes £50,000 for 2009-10 for 'Local Priorities', if an award of £4435 is approved, £46,565 will remain in this allocation for 2009-10.

The planned operating budget does not include any provision for further SSDC support other than the tourism grant of £500.

Corporate Priorities

5.1: - Enable the continued development of multi-service hubs (one stop shops) across South Somerset.

Area Priorities

4. Increase access to public and community services, including the development of local public access points and access to Internet technology.

7. Increase opportunities for residents and visitors of all ages to access and enjoy the built and natural heritage of Area North

Other implications

None

Background Papers: *Grants Report to Area North Committee, December 2006*
Grants Report to Area North Committee, Langport Local Information Centre, November 2008
Update Report to Joint Area North Committee, Langport Information Centre & Community Office, February 2009
