

Item

Decisions to Support Community Services Reviews

To:

Councillor Anna Smith Executive Councillor for Communities and Deputy Leader (Statutory)
Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee 7th October 2021

Report by:

Allison Conder, Strategic Project Manager, Community Services
Tel: 01223 457862 Email: Allison.conder@cambridge.gov.uk

Wards affected:

Abbey, Arbury, Castle, Cherry Hinton, Coleridge, East Chesterton, King's Hedges, Market, Newnham, Petersfield, Queen Edith's, Romsey, Trumpington, West Chesterton

Not a key decision

1. Executive Summary

The Play Pods scheme is a chargeable service operated by the Council's Children and Young People's Participation service (ChYpPS). It was set up in 2014, in part to raise funds to support other ChYpPS work. However, a review of the service in February 2019, found that staffing costs in fact outweighed any income benefit, and the service has a net annual cost to the Council of £26k. The review also found that, since 2015, only four Play Pods had been delivered to city schools, but eighteen had been delivered to schools outside of the city.

On 26th February 2019, the Strategic Director took an operational decision to cease delivery of any more out-of-city Play Pods, and to implement exit routes for schools to secure training support and scrap top-ups from other providers. The loss of anticipated Play Pod income (which offsets some of the net cost) has been managed in year by the ChYpPS service through a staff vacancy freeze.

The proposal now is for the council to cease Associate Membership of the Bristol Scrap Store Play Pods scheme, and to discontinue the ChYpPS Play Pod service from 31st March 2022. There is potentially scope for other associate members to provide a Play Pod service to city schools from 1st April 2022.

The council helped set up the Scrap Store scheme in 1988, and it was initially managed by The Castle Project. In 2000, for viability reasons, the Council agreed to take this on and it was delivered as a mobile project from community centres. In 2012, Scrap Store moved into a commercial unit, The Box on Barnwell Business Park, under the management of the ChYpPS team. In addition to providing materials for the Play Pod scheme, city residents could also pay a membership fee to source arts, crafts and play materials at a low cost.

Like the Play Pod scheme, one of the intentions of Scrap Store was to raise income to support other areas of ChYpPS work. However, the 2019 review found that, like Play Pods, once staffing costs had been attributed to the Scrap Store, the service has a net annual cost to the council of £46.5k. Even if footfall to The Box were to double, the Scrap Store scheme would still not be able to generate sufficient income to cover staffing costs. The service uses The Box Unit, a council commercial unit at Barnwell Business Park for £5k per year rent, but the council could let The Box commercially to generate £18k income per year.

The Scrap Store concept of using items which would otherwise be discarded to make new things has proved popular, especially with crafters. The proposal, therefore, is to use the remainder of this year to make plans to evolve Scrap Store into an updated project, which would also be more broadly aligned to supporting the council's anti-poverty work with the community and voluntary sectors. Officers will work with community organisations to consider what is needed as well as research ideas used in other areas to bring forward a revised approach. It is anticipated that on conclusion of the feasibility work, the revised service will start in 2022-23. We anticipate that this could include a Library of Things-style of service, which has been used successfully elsewhere to reduce waste and support residents. (See section 3 below)

There are currently 9 staff posts which include an element of delivering either the Play Pod or Scrap Store schemes, or both. A staffing review is planned to support the council's corporate transformation programme, and this will include community development, community facilities and ChYpPS services. The review will aim to minimise redundancies and maximise opportunities for

staff development and progression. It is anticipated that because of the current number of unfilled vacancies, all staff, including those engaged in delivering Play Pods and Scrap Store with transferable skills and experience, will be able to apply for roles within the new staffing structure, across the various service areas. The consultation for the staffing review is planned to take place during spring/summer 2022, and any savings will be included within the wider Our Cambridge transformation programme.

2. Recommendations

The Executive Councillor is recommended to:

1. Cease delivering the ChYpPS Play Pod scheme from 31st March 2022
2. To complete feasibility work for a revised scrapstore-style scheme, aligned to support anti-poverty work, and for this new service to be launched as soon as possible in the 2022-23 financial year
3. Note the staffing implications

3. Background

The council's ChYpPS service became an Associate Member of the charity 'Children's Scrap Store' in 2014 and began to deliver a Play Pod service to schools in Cambridge and the East of England. A Play Pod is a shed or container in a school playground that contains scrap materials for children to play with at lunchtime. Research carried out in schools show the benefits to schools include encouraging less accidents and incidents at lunchtimes, and children returning to the classroom more ready to learn.

Schools pay to access the Play Pod service which provides; a secure storage facility; a range of scrap materials (such as cardboard tubes and ropes), a complete level-2 training process for the staff; ongoing support and mentoring to support a quality play environment; and regular scrap material top-ups.

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This report proposes to discontinue the ChYpPS Play Pod service entirely from 31st March 2022 because:

- i. It has not been widely utilized by city schools (only 4 Play Pods have been delivered in city schools, 18 to out of city schools)
- ii. The scheme does not, as was intended, generate income to subsidize other ChYpPS work, but instead has a net annual cost to the Council of £26k

- iii. Exit routes for schools with Pods have already been identified and there is scope for another associate member to takeover coverage of city schools from 1st April 2022

This report proposes to cease operating the Scrap Store service in its current form from the Box Unit on Barnwell Road on 31st March 2022 and incorporate it in a new scheme because:

- i. A revised scheme could be better targeted to specifically to support the council's anti-poverty work
- ii. Like Play Pods, once staffing costs have been attributed, the scheme does not generate income to subsidize other ChYpPS work and the service has a net annual cost to the council of £46.5k per year
- iii. The service currently uses a council commercial unit at Barnwell Business Park, which could be re-let to generate £18k per year income for the council

The proposal is not to cease offering a scrap for re-use scheme but to work with community partners to review and widen the scope to support anti-poverty work across the city. Feasibility work will be undertaken during 2021-22 and consider concepts such as 'The Library of Things', which is founded on the principle that "borrowing is better than buying" (from both a climate change perspective and an anti-poverty perspective). The work will assess; ideas such as the demand for a targeted service that offers free arts and crafts materials and a loan scheme for items such as DIY tools, and gardening equipment; the costs and financial sustainability; implementation options; and how this could all be made more locally available to residents.

Funding for the feasibility work will be met from existing budgets. If there are any future funding requirements, officers will liaise with stakeholders to explore internal and external funding options.

4. Implications

a) Financial Implications

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The Play Pods and scrap store schemes have a net annual cost to the council of £72k. The Play Pod service will cease from 31st March 2022 and will create a saving of £26k in next FY. The staff costs within the budget for the Play Pods will be redeployed as part of the Community Services staffing review, to either community centres management operation, or community

development. Any savings arising will be assigned to the Our Cambridge corporate transformation programme saving target.

It is not possible to identify whether there will be any saving from the scrap store scheme, as this is subject to feasibility work to assess a broader service offer. However, it may no longer require use of the commercial unit on Barnwell Road, and this could be relet by Property Services for £18k income per year.

b) Staffing Implications

There are nine staff posts that currently deliver an element of the Play Pod and/or Scrap Store schemes. All these posts are part of a wider Community Services staffing reviewing which is now underway, that will see integration of the ChYpPS team into either community development or community facilities. Staff consultation on draft proposals will take place spring/summer 2022 and these will be put at risk from 31st March 2022.

The staffing review will seek to minimise redundancies as far as is possible, and to achieve this the reviews of community development, ChYpPS and community facilities will take place concurrently, while maintaining the current recruitment freeze.

The draft staffing review proposals will see creation of an expanded community development service with opportunities for staff to consider their skillset and interests as part of this new structure. Staff will be encouraged to address their skills gaps to maximise securing new roles between now and spring/summer 2022. Any unavoidable redundancies could take place in Q3 2022-23.

c) Equality and Poverty Implications

An EQIA has been completed at Appendix 1.

d) Net Zero Carbon, Climate Change and Environmental Implications

Net medium positive rating arising mainly from reduced transport use. A Climate change rating has been completed at Appendix 2.

e) Procurement Implications

None.

f) Community Safety Implications

None, but a risk assessment of the broader Library of Things service offer will be undertaken during the feasibility stage.

5. Consultation and communication considerations

No formal consultation has taken place with users of the Play Pods or scrap store services.

The feasibility study for a broader scrap store service offer will undertake detailed consultation with community and voluntary sector organization's and with potential users of the new service in high need communities.

6. Background papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 2 – Climate Change Rating Assessment

8. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report please contact Allison Conder, Strategic Project Manager, tel: 01223 457862, email:

Allison.conder@cambridge.gov.uk

ⁱ Charity number: 1008788