

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
OFFICER'S REPORT TO THE FINANCE & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting Date: 8 July 2025

Subject: Strategic Review and EFDC Grant Agreement – Victory Hall and Chigwell Community Hub

1. Purpose of Report

This report sets out the Finance & Governance Committee's recommended next steps to support Full Council in progressing improvements at Victory Hall and the Chigwell Community Hub. It focuses on appointing a consultant to scope and cost the works, reviewing budgets, negotiating grant terms, and exploring funding and commercial opportunities.

2. Background

Following Full Council's review of Victory Hall and the Community Hub strategy, concerns remain about:

- The informal, rent-free use of the Community Hub by Limes Farm Community Group (LFCG) without formal approval.
- A conditional £60,401 grant from EFDC requiring match funding, a five-year rent-free period for LFCG, and restrictive terms limiting flexibility.
- Cost estimates for the grant provided by LFCG without independent validation.
- Ensuring fair community access and long-term sustainability for both venues.

3. Proposal

The Committee objective is to recommend that Full Council:

a) Approves appointing a qualified architect or consultant to independently scope and cost improvements for both sites, producing staged cost estimates to support financial planning. The scope of work should include:

- Accessibility improvements compliant with DDA, informed by user data.
- Shared, accessible toilet facilities for both venues, including upgrades at Victory Hall.
- Design and security features to prevent unauthorised access between the two venues serving different users.
- A shared kitchen accessible from both sides of the building designed for single-side use, plus small kitchenettes in bar areas for simultaneous use.
- Review of fire exit routes and entrance layouts
- Allocation of office and storage space, including use of roof storage at Victory Hall
- Sustainable heating and energy measures such as insulation, air source heat pumps, and solar panels to reduce operational costs and carbon footprint
- Identification of potential grant funding or subsidies to support sustainable energy upgrades

To achieve this the Council needs to:

- Consult broadly to ensure decisions reflect the needs of all residents and users, beyond LFCG engagement
- Continue grant negotiations with EFDC to seek more flexible terms
- Explore shared use, subsidising options and commercial hire options for the Community Hub, including financial and market benchmarking
- Draft a comprehensive design brief
- Identify suitable architects or consultant
- Investigate external funding for sustainable energy improvements

4. Supporting Documents

- Chair's letter to LFCG
- Clerk's letter to EFDC
- LFCG grant proposal and cost summary

5. Council Considerations

- **Finance:** Ensuring accurate costing and value for money
- **Governance:** Transparency and adherence to policies
- **Community:** Inclusive engagement and equitable access
- **Accessibility:** Improvements based on real needs
- **Security:** Measures to protect users and separate venues
- **Rights & Safety:** Respecting users' rights and reviewing fire safety
- **Environment:** Promoting sustainability through energy upgrades

6. Recommendations

That the Finance & Governance Committee:

- Assigns Cllr Braha, Cllr Costa and the Clerk to draft the initial project brief.
- Asks Cllr Braha to identify a suitable architect or consultant to scope and specify the works, requiring staged cost estimates
- Requests the RFO to review budgets to support Full Council approval of the appointment and related costs

Authorises officers to:

- Continue negotiations with EFDC on grant terms

- Draft consultation programme
- Explore commercial hire opportunities for the Community Hub, including financial analysis
- Investigate external grant funding for sustainable energy upgrades