

Middle Street Resource Centre – the new arrangements and how they came about.

Many people will remember that after the Centre was reprieved from complete closure in 2011, it was closed for refurbishment in 2012 and re-opened in Spring 2013. Many regular users returned to enjoy the renewed facilities, some old activities and support groups resumed and new ones were established.

Whilst life at the Centre continued very much as before, change was still in the air. The Centre was re-leased from County Day Service use, and although the County's excellent Mental Health Co-Production team continued to operate at the Centre, and took on its management for the time being, direct management of the Centre by the Council ceased altogether at the end of March 2015.

Faced last summer with the prospect of closure, BCR emerged as a steering group of people involved in the Centre and committed to its survival, and Beeston Community Resource CIO was registered by the Charity Commission on 13th March 2015. In our first newsletter of October 2014 we identified our challenge as being to convince the County of the need to retain the Centre, convince them that BCR would be able to manage it effectively, and reach agreement for the relevant part of the building (which excludes an office area retained in County Council use) to be made available to BCR on affordable terms.

The County Council responded positively by putting forward an outline proposal last October, BCR submitted a Business Plan at the end of November, and friendly and constructive negotiations ensued. These resulted in a resolution by the County's Finance and Property Committee on 23rd March to approve the granting of a one year Licence and Service Level Agreement to BCR to occupy the Centre, noting that if the licence is successful consideration will be given to the continuance of the arrangement by the grant of a lease.

The report to the Committee recorded BCR's intention to maintain the existing activities of music, gardening, crafts and educational courses together with a widening range of support services, and to make the Centre available and used by the local community. It refers to BCR's vision for the Centre to welcome and support anyone in the local communities who is suffering from mental illness or distress, is experiencing social exclusion for any reason or who requires assistance in developing the capacity and skills to overcome social disadvantage.

The report regarded BCR's vision as supporting the County Council's new approach to delivering services to local people through innovative service models. It describes the option for BCR to take over the management of the Centre as being the preferred option "because it establishes an innovative partnership arrangement which encourages beneficial voluntary sector activity, which supports the strategic aims of the Council, and has the potential to reduce the costs to the Council over time."

BCR is very grateful to the Council for the support which it is providing by making the Centre available to us free of any rental charge, by continuing to pay the overheads of the building for the first year, by enabling BCR to retain monies received from the hiring of rooms, and for grant aid towards wage costs as we begin to employ staff.