



Using your building to support social prescribing: A learnings guide

After successful trials in 2019, we launched a programme at the start of 2020 to use our estate to support the growth of social prescribing. We wanted to turn vacant spaces in our properties into vibrant community hubs that could support a range of health and wellbeing activities. These spaces could then be used by voluntary groups, charities and other community services to support patients being referred to social prescribing.

We looked for spaces that:

- ✓ Had no other immediate use
- ✓ We had the intention of retaining in the medium-long term
- ✓ Were in buildings where we had the freehold so we had more freedom to transform the space

We chose locations that:

- ✓ Had high levels of health and social care needs so that a community hub would add real value
- ✓ Had an existing social prescribing network that we could partner with

Identifying sites and transforming spaces hasn't always been easy, but together with our partners we've learned a lot about what it takes to create impactful community spaces. As we continue to expand our programme and look for more opportunities within our own estate, we're keen to share what we've learnt to help others think differently about how their space is used and help you get a project off the ground.

Have you thought about...?

Engaging early

Good engagement and strong relationships are key in creating impactful spaces. Each of our projects involved collaboration with a range of stakeholders including the CCG, ICS, voluntary sector and our occupiers. We didn't undertake any work until we knew what we planned to deliver would have the biggest impact on patients and the community.



Have you spoken to all the relevant stakeholders early on to discuss options and enlist support?



Have you engaged with the people in the community to find out what they want from shared space?

What the end users want

As the end users of the space, charities and community groups were pivotal for us in identifying exactly what works were required to create the most impactful space. We made sure we listened to what organisations wanted as sometimes it wasn't all about bricks and mortar; some well-judged furniture and material changes made spaces work for local needs.



What are the main health and wellbeing issues facing the community?



What community groups exist in the area?



What sort of services are regularly used or requested by the community?



Head to your local café, ask community groups, and speak to people in the waiting room to gather ideas.



Appoint or find a representative in the local area to conduct some primary research.



Speak to the local hospital manager, GP receptionist and practice managers.

Funding

Before starting the refurbishment works for our social prescribing sites, we scoped out the requirements from designing and constructing to furnishing and maintaining, costing it all up to make sure the projects were within budget.



Are all of the organisations familiar with the licences? Leave enough time to bring together the occupancy agreement just in case, even if they are 'light touch'



Does the space need redecorating or furnishing?

If so, who will pay for this?



Is there rent to pay for the space? If so, whose?



What about the heating and lighting, or water?

Maintenance

We self deliver the facilities management at most of our social prescribing sites but our allotment gardens are often maintained by local community groups as part of the social prescribing programme.



Will the space need maintaining?



Will seasonal maintenance be required, especially for outdoor spaces?



If so, who will organise a cleaner or gardener, or will a community group take on this work?

Booking

Some of the sites we've created have been solely for one occupier while others have multiple user groups which have facilitated sessions run by different charities, hosted peri-natal mental health training, supported local food banks and provided a meeting place for local patient participant groups, for example.



If the space is going to be used by multiple groups, who will ensure there's no double booking?



Will groups need to be let in to the space, or is it open access? If it's open, who will make sure only booked groups are attending?



For more information

If you'd like to discuss social prescribing opportunities, please get in touch with our [Customer Support Centre](#)