

THE EXECUTIVE

9 SEPTEMBER 2008

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF ADULT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

COMMUNITY FACILITIES REVIEW	For Decision
<p>Summary: A review of community facilities in the borough has been conducted in light of emerging good practice in the field. Using the results of that review a policy is proposed that develops the existing policy and has the following key objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To create a network of well managed community facilities2. To support asset transfer where it is appropriate3. To increase the use of community facilities4. To increase provision in those areas where it is needed5. To increase investment in all facilities <p>Wards Affected: All</p>	
<p>Recommendation(s) The Executive is asked to agree:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">(i) The policy for community facilities in Barking and Dagenham as set out in section 3.2 of this report;(ii) The outline criteria for asset transfer as set out in section 3.3 of this report in line with the Council's Land acquisitions and disposal rules and any further reports to the Executive as appropriate.(iii) To authorise the Corporate Director for Adult and Community Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Community Halls, to agree the detailed criteria for asset transfer.	
<p>Reason(s) To assist the Council in achieving its Community Priorities of 'Raising General Pride in the Borough' and 'Developing Rights and Responsibilities with the Local Community' and in order to create a network of good quality community facilities across the borough.</p>	
<p>Implications:</p> <p>Financial: There are no immediate financial implications directly as a consequence of this report. If additional investment is required as a consequence implementing the objectives of the Review of Community Facilities this could result in additional Capital expenditure and subsequent revenue costs related to capital / borrowing and improvements. External funding could ultimately reduce / mitigate any financial requirement and this is being sought where possible. If any Council funding is required to implement the community facilities policy appropriate consents will be sought through the Council's established financial procedures.</p> <p>Legal:</p>	

Legal implications may arise from the development of partnership agreements regarding the use of individual sites and buildings. These will be dealt with through the normal processes and with the full involvement of the Council's Legal Services.

Risk Management:

A full risk analysis was carried out as part of the review report and mitigating actions identified. These include developing fundraising capacity and governance skills in voluntary and community groups and working with umbrella groups to improve support for voluntary groups.

Social Inclusion and Diversity:

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a requirement on local authorities to make an assessment of the impact of new and revised policies in terms of race equality. Existing policies have already been subjected to impact assessments. This Authority has adopted an approach of extending the impact to cover gender, disability, sexuality, faith, age and community cohesion.

A Policy Proofing process has been introduced to assess such impacts and the outcome insofar as this report is concerned. Following an EIA initial screening potential issues were identified in the following areas:

- Historic patterns of established use that could put new organisations at a disadvantage in booking some facilities.
- Potential ignorance of the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act with subsequent discriminatory behaviour.
- The risk of disposing of council property without recognising unmet demand for facilities by some disadvantaged groups.

All of these will require the collection of additional data before developing a full action plan and a further detailed assessment of the impact of that will then take place.

Crime and Disorder:

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a responsibility on local authorities to consider the crime and disorder implications of any proposals. In relation to this report the key actions relate to:

- Ensuring that all users of community facilities are made aware of community safety and crime prevention
- Encouraging those responsible for the management of community facilities develop good working relationships with their local Safer Neighbourhood Teams
- Ensuring that training for facilities managers includes security in order to reduce the potential for vandalism and anti-social behaviour.
- Promoting the use of all community facilities emphasising their importance as centres for diversionary activity for young people

These matters will be promoted as part of the training that will be developed to support the better management of all community facilities.

Options Appraisal:

There are three options with regard to community management and/or ownership of community facilities. These are:

- To retain the status quo
- To undertake full-scale asset transfer in any case
- To transfer only when certain conditions are met regarding the capacity of particular CAs or voluntary bodies to successfully undertake the management role.

The status quo is not a viable option. We have a policy of supporting community halls as settings where community activities that develop social capital and promote community cohesion can take place but the policy of moving all halls towards local management is not yet working in practice. The Council has done little to promote the use of other possible venues and the current “stock” of community halls is continuing to deteriorate. It will not be helpful to continue in this vein.

To seek local asset management and/or ownership in all cases would clearly address the first concern but would also create other difficulties. In particular it would run the risk of passing local management to bodies that were not equipped to offer it and the risk of failure and forced council intervention would be high in some cases. Failures would set back the arguments in favour of such arrangements and should not be risked.

The council has an existing policy that recognises the value of local management. Through its work with voluntary and community groups the Council is aware of the capacity of local voluntary bodies. Therefore the best option would be to seek out those organisations that would have the capacity to take on the management role and to support, develop and encourage them into that role.

Contact Officer:

Philip Baldwin

Title:

Group Manager
Community
Development

Contact Details:

Tel: 020 8227 2530
Fax: 020 8227 2241
E-mail: philip.baldwin@lbbd.gov.uk

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 A Best Value Review of Community Halls was completed in 2002 and the recommendations agreed by Executive on November 26th 2002 included “That self-financing of Community Halls be developed over a three year period.....”. In effect the policy is to develop local community associations to take full responsibility for running their local Community Hall and eventually take over responsibility for the entire Hall with a long lease from the Council governing that relationship. In effect this model of “asset transfer” was well ahead of the similar policy now being promoted and developed by central government.

1.2 The implementation of this policy has required a lengthy development process for some Community Associations (CAs) and the physical condition of some halls has made some CAs reluctant to sign up to long leases that might mean they would need to meet big repair bills. However the adoption of a wider policy on community facilities in the Borough will support the delivery of the existing policy whilst improvements to the Halls will drive forward improvements in community facilities overall.

- 1.3 Community Halls are important as facilities that enable community-led activity in the Borough but they are not the only ones that do that. A strong network of community facilities will have the following benefits for the borough:
- *A Strong Community*: greater opportunities to strengthen ties within our communities by creating opportunities for people to come together
 - *Active and Healthy*: facilities that support the provision of services which enable citizens of all ages to live active and meaningful lives, for example older and disabled people
 - *Living and Working*: supporting the development of skills in management committees which can increase the employability of those individuals
 - *Enjoy and achieve*: more and better things to do and places to go
- 1.4 Officers in the Community Development Service have conducted a review of community facilities in the borough, with the aim of ensuring a 'fit for purpose' network of provision to meet the borough's needs into the future. Officers in Property Services have supported them in this work.
- 1.5 The following terms of reference were adopted for this review:

To develop and oversee the implementation of a strategy to improve the quality of service and efficiency of community facilities located in the borough, to meet the present and future needs of the community.

In this context, 'community facilities' are defined as venues available for public, communal activity, which can be hired by the statutory agencies, the public or voluntary and community organisations.

2. Consultation conducted to inform the review

- 2.1 A questionnaire was sent to more than 200 providers of potential community facilities (identified via a range of Council-held lists). The views of users of facilities were also sought via questionnaires published in the Citizen, publicised in the local press, and made available in libraries and community halls. A questionnaire was also sent to all Members.
- 2.2 A presentation was made to Scrutiny Management Board, seeking views of SMB to inform the review. Members were given a further opportunity to contribute, via several briefing sessions, immediately prior to the completion of the current draft of the review.
- 2.3 Colleagues in Children's Services working in the field of extended schools have been consulted about the review report. Officers from children's, leisure, and property services, as well as from the PCT have been consulted about plans for Community Halls, seeking to identify any potential synergies with the Council's emerging asset strategy.
- 2.4 In discussion with colleagues from Property Services it has been agreed that any requirement for future premises that arises will be reviewed via the Council's Corporate Asset Management Group in the first instance to ensure that other existing or planned assets would not fulfil these requirements. Likewise, where any

Community Hall becomes surplus to requirements, it will be reviewed as a corporate disposal and subject to the formal disposal process.

3. A policy for community facilities in Barking and Dagenham

3.1 A policy is proposed, in light of the review and developing the existing policy and this is set out below. This policy is designed to:

- a) Create a network of well managed community facilities
- b) Support asset transfer where it is appropriate
- c) Increase usage of community facilities
- d) Increase provision in those areas where it is needed
- e) Increase investment in all facilities

3.2 The proposed policy is: -

- a. The Council will work to identify, through its Neighbourhood Management service, gaps in the provision of community facilities in the borough and local groups that may be capable of development to undertake management of local community facilities where this is required.
- b. Community Halls may be transferred on a long lease to voluntary sector organisations where a business case has demonstrated social or community benefits which would arise from such a transfer and where the management capacity of the organisation has been demonstrated to be sufficiently robust.
- c. Covenants within the lease will require the Community Association to comply with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy in the management and operation of the Hall.
- d. Preparations for asset transfer where appropriate will continue in line with the policy set out above and the detailed Government guidance to ensure good practice published on July 9th 2008.
- e. Any proposed disposals of Council property or requirements for future premises will be considered in light of the Council's developing Asset Management Strategy and their potential to address unmet demand for community facilities.
- f. The Council will support schools and other statutory agencies to make their facilities available to the wider community, particularly in areas where gaps in provision are identified.
- g. The Council will develop and implement a framework of standards based on good practice relating to the governance, management and operation of community facilities.
- h. The Council will support within existing resources the development of an informal network of community facilities in the borough, comprised of facilities owned by statutory, community and private sector providers.

- i. The Council will facilitate training, development and guidance for voluntary community organisations in the area of governance, management and operation of community facilities.
 - j. The Council will take action to encourage the inclusion of additional venues in the network and the development of community capacity to support future asset transfers.
- 3.3 Within the expanded policy it is proposed that the Council develop clear criteria for the transfer of the management of council-owned Community Halls to appropriate voluntary groups. These will include such factors as: -
- The strength and capacity of the voluntary group
 - The range and value of the regular community activities using the hall
 - The physical condition of the premises
 - The financial sustainability of the proposal
 - The potential to access funding from non – Council sources
 - Potential synergies with other services

These criteria will be developed further in the coming months, and Member views on what might be included in those criteria are sought. Rigorous processes will be put in place to determine precisely how the criteria can be met and it is proposed that agreement to the detailed criteria be delegated to the Corporate Director for Adult and Community Services, in consultation for the Portfolio Holder for Community Halls. Any proposals for asset transfer will be brought to the Executive in due course.

4. Consultees

4.1 The following were consulted in the preparation of this report:

Portfolio holder Adult and Community Services
Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services
Head of Community Services, Libraries and Heritage
Interim Group Manager Assets
Head of Leisure, Arts and Olympics
Head of Quality and School Improvement
Corporate Asset Manager
Group Manager Asset Management and Capital
Group Manager Extended Schools
Primary Care Trust

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Returns received from more than 80 different groups responsible for specific community facilities in the Borough
Making Assets Work: The Quirk Review – Report from DCLG May 2007
Strong and Prosperous Communities - Local Government White Paper 2006
Community Facilities Review – full report produced by the Council November 2007
Managing Risks in Asset Transfer – Report from DCLG July 2008